

**COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**FIFTY-THIRD SESSION  
2 – 13 MARCH 2009**

**Introductory Statement  
by**

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Mr. Chairperson,  
Madam President of the Economic and Social Council,  
Madam Deputy Secretary-General,  
Mr. Sha, Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Representatives of the NGO community and of United Nations agencies,  
Colleagues and Friends,

It is an honour and pleasure to welcome you to this session of the Commission on the Status of Women. I extend a warm welcome to the many distinguished members and observers who came from capitals. Your presence testifies to the importance that Member States accord to the work of this Commission.

My deep appreciation goes to you, Mr. Chairperson, and the other members of the Bureau for your particular contribution to the success of the Commission's work in these past two years. In particular, I commend you on the efficient working methods and the quality of the outcomes which have had impact on gender related aspects of the outcomes of other intergovernmental processes, including the Declaration of the Doha Review Conference and the Accra Agenda for Action, whose gender dimensions were a direct result of the 2008 agreed conclusions of the Commission. In addition, previously, gender aspects had been mainstreamed in the ministerial declarations of the 2007 and 2008 substantive sessions of the Economic and Social Council.

We look forward to the continuation of this pattern in the Economic and Social Council's 2009 and 2010 sessions when the annual ministerial reviews would be devoted respectively to implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments with regard to global public health and gender equality.

The theme of this session - "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS" - is most timely as sharing responsibilities between women and men is critical to women's political, social and economic empowerment. In both developed and developing countries, it is women who assume most of the domestic and care work. A project of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development covering Argentina, India, Nicaragua, Republic of Korea, South Africa and Tanzania, for example, found that the mean time spent by women on unpaid care work was more than twice that of men. In the context of HIV/AIDS, care has become a major source of inequality: it has been estimated that globally, women and girls provide up to 90 per cent of the care needs generated by the illness. The unequal sharing of responsibilities has implications for a

range of policy areas, including political participation, health, social welfare, family, education and labour market.

Women's unpaid work, as a critical societal function must be recognized and efforts intensified to reduce its burden and time. Incentives for men to contribute to these activities are required. Governments must eliminate discrimination against women, and create an environment where men equally share family and caregiving responsibilities. Without equal division of labour between women and men the achievement of gender equality would remain elusive.

Mr. Chairperson,

The fifty-third session of the Commission is taking place at a critical time in the quest for the advancement of women. The year 2010 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women. It is also the year of the review of progress made by Member States, international organizations and civil society in achieving the goals set forth by the Beijing and Cairo Conferences, as well as the Millennium Summit.

During these two weeks, the Commission will discuss modalities for the review of the implementation of the Beijing Conference and define future organization and methods of its work. The Commission will also determine the themes for 2010-2014. Your deliberations during this short session will be critical inputs to the discussions in 2010. They will shape the policies and programmes of the world community on gender equality and women's enjoyment of their fundamental rights and freedoms in the coming years.

I urge you to be bold and ignite a new political momentum in order to turn the tide of the past decade and reinvigorate the world-wide gender equality agenda.

While charting these major directions, you may wish to keep in mind that an unusual confluence of major threats such as the global financial crisis, projected global economic slowdown, food and energy crises; world-wide increase in unemployment, instability and outbreaks of hostilities, violence against women and global environmental deterioration already have serious adverse impact on the progress made towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

In fact, these challenges threaten to reverse the progress made since the Beijing Conference. Despite demonstrable progress, delays in reaching the MDGs, in particular including MDGs 3, 4 and 5, coupled with losses of women's jobs and livelihoods, shrinking safety nets, unabated violence against women and other challenges, many of which require urgent attention and collective action, give reason for concern. Unless workable solutions to these crises are found, their pernicious impacts on women will be deep and pervasive.

We must therefore seize the opportunities which these challenges offer and build on the progress made last year.

Today, I would like to use this occasion to focus on six of the most pressing challenges to gender equality.

First, though there have been steady improvements in many of the world's poorest countries with regard to women's and girls' education and health levels, progress is off track on targets for economic empowerment of women. In low-income countries, women consistently lag behind men in formal labour force participation, access to credit, entrepreneurship rates, income levels and inheritance and ownership rights. It is bad economics to leave a large human resource untapped.

The High level event convened by the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly on 25 September last year on the Millennium Development Goals resulted in a raft of commitments on issues ranging from malaria prevention to reforestation. The Danish Government MDG3 Global Call to Action generated significant support for new commitments from Governments to achieve MDG3. It called on all governments to make gender equality and women's empowerment a key issue and to substantially increase domestic resource allocation for gender equality and women's empowerment by 2010; and on bilateral and multilateral donors and others to double Overseas Development Assistance to gender equality and women's empowerment. We must scale up the implementation of MDGs, in particular MDG 3 and fulfill the commitments made.

Second, the unfolding financial and economic crisis, recession in major developed market economies, increasing global imbalances and shrinking credit markets are not only slowing growth of the global economy and undermining efforts towards the development goals, they are also threatening progress in women's advancement. Though incomplete, evidence gathered by the World Bank, UNCTAD, UNDP, ILO and other UN entities during 2008 suggest that women are hardest hit through the losses of employment; further restrictions on access to loans, even micro-loans; reduced wages, income and spending on health and education; worsening working conditions and malnutrition. In export oriented industries suffering from sagging demand, women are losing their livelihoods at the fastest pace. The lack of social safety nets make women, primarily heads of households, particularly vulnerable to economic shocks and financial turmoil.

How can we turn this crisis into an opportunity for women? The Declaration of the Doha Review Conference and the Accra Agenda for Action acknowledged that most of the people living in extreme poverty were women and girls. They stated that addressing inequality in income and opportunity within countries and between states was essential to progress; that gender equality, was amongst the corner stones for achieving enduring impact on the lives and potentials of poor men, women and children; and that both donor and developing countries' policies and programmes must be designed and implemented consistently with international commitments on gender equality.

It is vital therefore that the Conference on the Global Financial and Economic Crisis to be held later this year incorporates gender perspectives in its outcome. Financing for gender equality is crucial if we are serious about promoting women's equality and eradicating poverty. Investing in women pays off. It is an effective means to reduce poverty, counter impacts of the crisis, increase economic growth and accelerate the achievement of all the MDGs.

Third, food prices while in decline lately, are still hitting hard on the livelihoods of poor women and their families. In the long-term perspective, unless factors that led to last year's soaring food prices are addressed, progress to date towards poverty eradication and food security could easily be reversed. According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization statistics, the years 2007 and 2008 saw an addition of 114 million undernourished. Thus, the total of the undernourished in the world is around 963 million or 15 per cent of the total population. Women, particularly poorest, landless and female household heads are most vulnerable. Women's health and often lives are at risk. Nutritional decline, decline in school attendance and work productivity, accumulated health vulnerability and overall social insecurity have pervasive impact on women's and girls' lives.

The High-level Conference on the World Food Security held in 2008 in Rome played a critical role in establishing a Comprehensive Framework for Action emphasizing the critical importance of gender equality. However, we need to act in the short term by putting social protection systems for undernourished women and their families in place as well as in the long term by enhancing food production and trade and empowering women economically.

Fourth, the profound impact of climate change and the deterioration of the environment already bear down on women's lives in many places. Since this Commission's expert panel on this theme last year, there is more evidence that women living in communities that are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood are disproportionately more vulnerable to and affected by climate change. Major shifts in rainfall patterns, accelerating desertification rendering land infertile, or sea-level rise inundating farmlands and furthering the spread of disease, make women more vulnerable than men, as they lack access to land ownership, decision-making, resources and training. Moreover, women's household's recovery from natural disasters takes longer. It is therefore critical to infuse a gender perspective in the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) in Copenhagen

Fifth, violence against women - one of the most extreme manifestations of pervasive violations of women's human rights - continues unabated and intensified world wide efforts are needed to end it. Its consequences and costs are far-reaching, long-lasting, and devastating not only for its victims but also to societies.

Last year in this Commission, the Secretary-General launched the global campaign 'UNite to End Violence against Women', a multi-year effort aimed at preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls in all parts of the world. The overall objective of the Secretary-General's campaign is to raise public awareness and increase political will and resources for preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls. The Campaign provides a collective platform to engage a wide range of stakeholders, including Governments, Parliaments, men leaders, women's groups, youth, academia, religious organizations and the private sector to name a few, in an unprecedented level of global mobilization, linking their initiatives to the Secretary-General's efforts.

A 'Framework for Action and the **Programme of the United Nations Activities and Expected Outcomes and Outputs of the Secretary-General's Campaign Unite to End Violence against Women 2008-2015**' was developed through interagency consultations and was endorsed by the High Level Committee on Programmes of the **Chief Executives Board**. The Framework for Action provides an overall 'umbrella' for the United Nations system efforts at global, regional, national and local levels. Five key outcomes have been set as the benchmarks which the Campaign aims to inspire all countries to achieve by 2015:

- National laws are in place and enforced
- National plans of action are adopted that are multi-sectoral and adequately resourced
- Data collection and analysis systems are institutionalized.
- National and/or local campaigns are launched.
- Sexual violence in conflict situations is systematically addressed in all peace and security policy and funding frameworks.

At the National Level, a number of countries have taken important steps towards integrating the Secretary-General's Campaign in their national agendas. United Nations entities support the Secretary-General's Campaign and a number of activities have taken place during this first year of the campaign aiming at raising awareness and building capacity of Member States in fighting this scourge. Many programmes and activities are being planned at both country and regional levels.

You are all invited to the United Nations' observance of International Women's Day in which the Secretary-General would participate. The theme of the Day will be "Women and Men united to end violence against women and girls" and the observance will take place on 5 March 2009.

Sixth, last summer, the Security Council for the first time discussed the issue of sexual violence against women, as a theme. This issue emerged as a high intergovernmental priority in fighting violence

against women and achieving sustainable peace and security. Security Council resolution 1820, which resulted from this discussion, expresses a clear mandate and commitment to combating this scourge in conflict areas on the agenda of the Council.

UN system wide efforts coordinated by DPKO are under way to analyze factors that allow sexual violence to occur and be used as a deliberate tactic of war, as well as approaches and mechanisms to address and prevent violence, and methods to collect data for the forthcoming report of the Secretary-General due by 30 June 2009. We are looking beyond 2009 to intensify system wide efforts to report and prevent sexual violence in conflict areas.

In the same realm of women and peace, implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) has been at the centre of our efforts to promote women's participation in peace processes and mainstream a gender perspective. Since the adoption of the resolution in 2000, progress has been made at the international, regional and national levels.

Next year we shall commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the resolution. This provides an opportunity for in depth review of progress and challenges in the area of women, peace and security. The Secretary-General has positively responded to the proposal of Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, to convene in 2010 a ministerial level meeting to review the implementation of the resolution and to address the remaining challenges. This review must be carried out at all levels including the global, regional and national levels in order to feed into the Security Council ministerial meeting in October 2010. As preparations for this event commence, your suggestions and guidance would be important. In this regard, last year I raised the plight of widows. Conflicts world-wide are generating large numbers of widows who are left destitute. Perhaps this Commission can request a study to determine the extent of the phenomenon and adopt policy measures to address it.

Mr. Chairperson,

I am pleased to report that the UN system is responding fully to these realities and challenges. A meeting of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality which I chair concluded its eighth session last Thursday. It was stimulating and energizing with more than 70 participants representing 27 UN entities. The discussions on emerging challenges in the context of the financial, economic and food crises, climate change, peace and security, MDGs, trade, employment and violence against women were refreshing and offered new approaches and strategies.

Plans are under way to scale up for MDG 3 achievement, creating a new strong momentum for mainstreaming a gender perspective into critical areas of the financial and economic crises, and trade; alleviate long terms impact of food prices and climate change, enhance women's empowerment, including through decent work; coordinate UN system wide response to sexual and other forms of violence and many others.

Thanks to efforts of UN entities, system wide cooperation and coherence are becoming an ineluctable fact of life. UN entities increasingly seek to cooperate for the benefit of all. In gender equality area we have, perhaps, moved forward ahead of the whole UN system with system wide policy and strategy, accountability frameworks and action plans. The Network contributed significantly to interagency advocacy efforts, development of new approaches and policies, harmonization of business practices, exchange of experience and capacity building. It is increasingly becoming a joint programming mechanism for example on programmes related to violence against women and a forum for greater exchange of information and plans among the Network's members.

While responding to current challenges, the Network is also initiating change and developing tools for gender mainstreaming in the United Nations system, such as a system wide action plan for

gender mainstreaming, accountability frameworks, new mainstreaming approaches and strategies, including for UN Country Teams in the One UN pilots; system wide capacity building, creating knowledge management networks and data bases and many other projects.

The Commission will be pleased to note that the United Nations System Staff College and my Office, in cooperation with many UN entities, embarked on the development of a three tiered capacity building programme, which would consist of a basic course for all staff, a more in-depth course for programme staff and a briefing for senior management.

Mr. Chairperson,

Allow me to turn briefly to the issue of the representation of women in the professional and policy-making categories. As of 31 December 2007, the representation of women in the UN system stood at 38.4 per cent in the Professional and higher categories, representing an increase of 1.5 percentage point from 2005. In the UN Secretariat from July 2006 to June 2008, women's share in the same categories increased only by 0.2 per cent from 37.4 to 37.6 per cent.

As indicated in the latest Secretary-General's report on the Improvement in the Status of Women in the UN system (A/63/364) a number of factors account for this slow pace of growth including inadequate accountability, insufficient outreach; low numbers of qualified women applicants; and lack of adequate data on the causes of high attrition rates for women.

Mr Chairperson,

Much progress was made in 2008 in intergovernmental discussions on strengthening of the UN system's work on gender equality and women's empowerment under the able leadership of the Co-Chairs of system wide coherence, Ambassador Paul Kavanagh of Ireland and Ambassador Augustine Mahiga of the United Republic of Tanzania. Member States reviewed and discussed two papers submitted by the Deputy Secretary-General, one on gaps and challenges and another on institutional arrangements to bridge these gaps. They agreed that the current gender architecture of the UN system was fragmented. They acknowledged the inadequate funding, the existing gaps and challenges between policies and their implementation, and the lack of a recognized driver to direct UN activities.

Four options were proposed: the status quo, a fund/programme, a department or a combination of the above – a composite entity. Regrettably, the Assembly was unable to reach consensus on one of the options. In response to General Assembly resolution 62/277, a new paper providing further details on all options while focusing on the composite entity was prepared under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General, based on views expressed by Member States, in close cooperation with UN entities and broad consultation with civil society. The paper will soon be submitted to the President of the General Assembly.

All eyes are on the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Assembly to take a decision on this critical issue.

I would like to thank the former Co-Chairs of informal consultations on system-wide coherence Ireland and Tanzania and welcome new Co-Chairs, Namibia and Spain, and wish them every success in this challenging but so much needed intergovernmental process. I would like to pay special tribute to the Deputy Secretary-General for her strong commitment to gender equality and her leadership in facilitating consensus among all UN entities on this critical issue.

Finally, I would like to very briefly introduce the report of the Secretary-General on Strengthening the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (E/CN.6/2009/11) prepared in response to resolution 52/3 of this Commission. It summarizes the efforts of INSTRAW to strengthen and expand its training and research activities in the following areas: (a)

gender, migration and development; (b) governance and women's political participation; and (c) gender, peace and security, in accordance with its strategic framework for 2008-2011.

The report also describes the progress the Institute has made to secure sufficient funds to finance its core activities and its continued efforts to collaborate with United Nations system entities, international organizations, governmental institutions, national gender machineries, research and training institutes, civil society organizations and the private sector.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

We are facing many challenges in this and the coming years. We need swift, bold and uncompromising policies to facilitate additional and more effective ways of implementing the Platform for Action while scaling up implementation of the MDGs and fighting multiple crises. The Commission on the Status of Women can play a key role in providing authoritative advice to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, guiding national machineries, international organizations and civil society towards the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment goals simultaneously on many fronts.

I am convinced that, working together in this session of the Commission, with your valuable guidance and all the rich first-hand experiences from capitals, we will be able to make further decisive steps toward these goals. My Office and the Division for the Advancement of Women as well as the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality stand ready to assist you in your work. I wish you a most productive session.

Thank you.

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