

STATEMENT BY

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PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

AT

THE OPENING OF THE FIFTY-FIFTH SESSION
OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

22 February 2011

Chair,
Deputy Secretary-General,
Under-Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

It is a great honour for me to address the opening of the 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The Economic and Social Council and its newly elected Bureau are keenly aware of the critical role this Commission performs for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, and as a catalyst for gender mainstreaming across the intergovernmental machinery. I pledge the full support of the Council Bureau for your efforts.

The Economic and Social Council is the main forum in the United Nations for discussing international economic and social matters, and for formulating relevant policy recommendations. ECOSOC, as a coordinating body, has a crucial role in merging the normative and operational aspects of the work of the United Nations.

During my tenure as President of the Council, I shall strive for greater inter-linkages and coherence between the Council and its functional commissions, as well as to enhance the alignment of the work of ECOSOC with that of other UN entities and regional mechanisms of the UN Development Group. With the necessary cooperation, ECOSOC can be more strategic, bold and forward-looking.

Chair,

It is gratifying to note that the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UN Women, is expeditiously moving towards making a difference in the lives of women and girls around the world, particularly in developing countries. During the negotiations for the establishment of UN Women, Member States were emphatic in their call to prioritize support to national partners in countries and enhanced support at the country level where the needs are greatest. Let us ensure that we do not fail to live up to their expectations.

With the able dynamic leadership of Madam Bachelet we are confident that with her vision, ambition and determination, she will rise up to the challenge. Member States must equally demonstrate the necessary political will to ensure that the entity succeeds.

Chair,

At this fifty-fifth session, the Commission will focus on women's access to and participation in education, training, science and technology, and the transition to employment. Education is a basic human right, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women elaborates

Check against delivery

on women's equal rights in the field of education. The Convention also elaborates on the need to eliminate stereotypical concepts of the roles of men and women in all forms and at all levels of education. The past decade has seen remarkable improvements in the field of education, particularly at the primary level. Investing in women's and girls' education has positive multiplier effects on the wellbeing of their families and the development of their communities and nations. Such investments lead to faster poverty reduction and more sustainable economic growth. I believe in the old Chinese saying that:

“To plan for a day, catch a fish; To plan for a year, plant rice; To plan for a decade, plant a tree; But to plan for a lifetime, educate a girl!”

Yet the majority of children of primary-school age, as well as adolescents who are out of school are girls, and the gaps are significant in many, especially developing, countries. Gender stereotypes continue to permeate society, and contribute to steering women and men into segregated study and career paths, with adverse consequences for women's economic opportunities and income. We continue to witness great challenges in women's transition into the labour market. Women's labour force participation was estimated to be 52.6 per cent in 2008, compared with a male participation rate of 77.5 per cent. Among the 20- to 24-year-old population, women continue to lag behind men in labour force participation in all regions, with South Asia recording the greatest gap, namely 82 per cent of men and 27 per cent of women employed or seeking employment.

The recent global crises have slowed progress previously made towards the achievement of many social development goals, including education. Each of these overlapping crises exacerbated existing gender inequalities threatened the progress made so far, and made it harder to achieve the practical realization of the equality of women and men.

No country can develop in a sustainable way without the full and effective participation of women in all aspects of life. While Governments have primary responsibility for achieving the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment, partnerships and strategic alliances among all stakeholders are key for achieving effective, concrete and measurable results for women and girls. Non-governmental organizations have consistently advocated for translation of Governments' commitments into practical reality, and I welcome their significant presence at this session.

In its Ministerial Declaration of 2010, on gender equality and the empowerment of women, the Economic and Social Council recognized the persistence of implementation gaps, and outlined strategies to close those gaps. At our session in July, we will monitor progress in implementation of the Declaration to enhance accountability of all stakeholders. It is my hope that the outcome of this Commission will provide the necessary action oriented strategic direction that will feed into the ECOSOC's Annual Ministerial Review on the Implementation of the internationally agreed goals with regard to education.

I wish you every success as you embark on two weeks of rich debate and exchange of experiences and good practices, and consider lessons learned to overcome obstacles and challenges.

Thank you.