

Check against delivery

**Commission on the Status of Women  
Fifty-fifth Session  
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**Introductory Statement  
by  
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Madam Deputy Secretary-General,  
President of the Economic and Social Council,  
Chair,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Colleagues and friends,

It is an honour for me to address you on this first day of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and the first session that is supported by UN Women. Last year, you called for full implementation of the General Assembly's commitment to merge the four existing institutions into a new and expanded entity for gender equality and women's empowerment. It is an achievement of this Commission and the many committed advocates for women's rights - that the UN Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment or - UN Women - is now established and operational. I am privileged to be its first Under-Secretary General and Executive Director.

I extend a warm welcome to all Government representatives, especially those that have travelled from Capitals. A warm welcome also to the representatives of non-governmental organizations and networks and colleagues from the UN system. I would like to express my appreciation to the Chair and the members of the Bureau of the Commission for the diligent preparation of this session, the consultations with all member and observer States and the briefings of other stakeholders.

Distinguished delegates

Today I will brief you on the progress that we have made in operationalizing UN Women, as well as introduce the main topics of this session of the Commission.

But let me preface this by reminding all of us of the enormous responsibility we have - together with you as members of this Commission - to work strategically and visibly in support of our collective quest for gender equality. Development analysts increasingly present evidence that gender equality is central to economic and social development, peace and democracy. Around the world, we see more men and men's groups advocating to protect women's rights and we see more women take their place, alongside men, in using new technologies in creative ways,

whether to market their products globally or to support movements for democratic transformation as we have seen in recent weeks.

Here today are representatives from many countries that have made real progress in increasing women's political representation at national and local levels, in achieving parity in primary education between girls and boys and in reducing the numbers of maternal deaths. Many of you have worked with your colleagues from Government and Parliament to secure passage of new or strengthened laws to penalize domestic violence, to eliminate discrimination in the labour market, to guarantee women's property and inheritance rights.

This Commission is a forum for each of you to share your innovations, your best practices and experiences about what works and how the policy and legal reforms you secure are contributing to concrete changes in the lives of women and girls, as well as of men and boys. It is also the forum where you agree, and commit to additional measures to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

At the same time, this forum knows better than others, that despite encouraging examples, this progress is uneven and fragile. As we sit in this room today, there are still too many women and children who are trafficked; too many domestic workers who left their families to live in new places, unprotected by labour laws or policies; too many girls forced to leave school or married too early, too many women and girls who lack access to services, whether agricultural extension, health clinics, affordable transportation or legal aid. And, worldwide, there are too few women who are at decision-making tables when peace, trade or climate change agreements are being negotiated.

The global jobs crisis is still unresolved, and unemployment rates remain well above pre-crisis levels. Millions of workers have been pushed into vulnerable employment, and a growing number of countries have endorsed fiscal austerity measures. In a time of crisis and flux, we must seize new opportunities and guard against postponing action for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment until better or more stable conditions prevail, until we have tackled the current crisis, until we have progressed further on the road of development. Lack of equality between women and men and discrimination against women impede progress in development, peace and security, and the realization of human rights. Discrimination and inequality are the problem – women are part of the solution, and we must fully tap women's potential and creativity for a better future.

The specific and urgent challenges of reaching women – especially the poorest women – in rural areas, in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, is something that we need to hear more about. The ways that women are affected by natural disasters, as well as conflict and displacement and the challenges they face in gaining access to decision-making in every sector are also important topics for this body.

This is why we need to hear frank analysis about the challenges that different countries and regions are facing and how we can work together at national, regional and global levels to address these.

These issues have always been crucial for the CSW, but we now have a strengthened opportunity with UN Women - a new UN entity that has a unique and clear mandate to help ensure a more seamless relationship between the normative guidance provided by Member States and operational activities. That too makes this session of the CSW particularly important, as it is the first opportunity to maximize the mandate of UN Women and turn these linkages into concrete changes for women and girls.

Distinguished Delegates,

Turning to our progress in making UN Women operational - I see this session of CSW also as an opportunity to help me understand Member States' priorities and expectations for UN Women and ensure that those are reflected in UN Women's first Strategic Plan, which I will present to UN Women's Executive Board this June. The Executive Board of UN Women, which governs the operational aspects of our activities, was elected by the Economic and Social Council last November, and held its first session in late January, 2011. The Board approved UN Women's voluntary support budget, enabling us to begin recruiting the senior management team, to take steps for strengthening country-level and regional operations, and to cover initial operating costs in 2011.

I wanted to share with you how UN Women will implement the vision on which it is grounded. This is a vision of a world where women and men have equal rights and opportunities, and the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment are firmly integrated in the development, human rights, and peace and security agendas.

To meet this objective, UN Women will centre its work around *five core principles*: 1) providing demand-driven support to national partners to enhance implementation of international agreements and standards; 2) supporting intergovernmental processes to strengthen the global normative and policy framework on gender equality; 3) advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment, championing the rights of women and girls — particularly those who are most excluded; 4) leading and promoting coherence in UN system work on gender equality; and 5) acting as a global broker of knowledge and experience, aligning practice with normative guidance.

In my consultations with many stakeholders, I have heard a number of clear messages: that UN Women must focus on a few issues and achieve visible results; that we must work in partnership with the UN system, not in competition; that we must build on what we have achieved, but improve and deepen our work, and that we must think outside the box. Most importantly, we must prioritize support to national partners at country level.

Bearing in mind specific country contexts and capacities, UN Women will focus on *five thematic priorities* in its operational activities:

- 1) ***Expanding women's voice, leadership and participation***, working with partners to close the gaps in women's leadership and participation in different sectors and to demonstrate the benefits of such leadership for society as a whole;
- 2) ***Ending violence against women*** by enabling states to set up the mechanisms needed to formulate and enforce laws, policies and services that protect women and girls, promote the involvement of men and boys, and prevent violence;
- 3) ***Strengthening implementation of the women, peace and security agenda***, through women's full participation in conflict resolution and peace processes, gender-responsive early-warning, protection from sexual violence and redress for its survivors in accordance with UN resolutions.
- 4) ***Enhancing women's economic empowerment*** including in the context of global economic and environmental crises. UN Women will work with governments and multilateral partners to ensure the full realization of women's economic security and rights, including access to productive assets and full social protection;
- 5) ***Making gender equality priorities central to national, local and sectoral planning and budgeting***: working with partners, UN Women will support national capacities in evidence-based planning, budgeting and statistics.

UN Women's transition towards a dynamic and innovative Entity that integrates all our previous functions and mandates is a complex one, and we still have key steps to accomplish. We are completing the alignment of the existing staff to the new structure and finalizing a field capacity assessment to guide our investments in strengthening our teams at country level. While this transformation is taking place, we have continued to support all ongoing programmatic commitments and mandates of the former four entities.

There is much more to be done. I hope that we will make the senior appointments very soon to have my management team in place and ensure our staff in New York are working from one location, to start the real "institutional culture change" that we are expected to generate.

I am very grateful for the enthusiastic support that I have received from so many of you. I would ask that you give us some time, but also that you remain ardent advocates for UN Women to receive the resources necessary to assume its full role. And, finally, that you hold UN Women and the UN system accountable for meeting the high expectations that you so rightly have.

Distinguished delegates,

Turning to the issues before this session of the Commission:

The priority theme that you have chosen for this year - "Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work" - could not be more timely. The two reports of the Secretary-General on this theme illustrate how gender stereotypes permeate society, and lead to segregation in the labour market. They also provide examples of measures taken by Governments, civil society and the private sector, in various parts of the world, to ensure that women and girls can exercise their right to education, that they gain greater access to decent work, and that they contribute equally to developing and applying the principles and tools of science and technology.

Our analysis, based also on inputs from Member States, highlights five key points:

1. Expanding access to education is not enough - it is crucial to also improve the quality and relevance of education. This can include measures such as prioritizing professional development of teachers, improving learning conditions, and revising school curricula.
2. Gender stereotypes are a root cause of occupational segregation - and must be tackled systematically. Measures can include, revising educational materials and sensitizing teachers, and exposing both girls and boys to role models in non-traditional fields, such as female engineers or male kindergarten teachers.
3. However: Education is not enough for women to gain access to decent work - proactive measures are needed to facilitate their transition from school to work, that is, equal access to labour market opportunities. Measures can include job search trainings and gender-sensitive social protection schemes.
4. Science and technology insufficiently responds to the needs of both women and men - the content of research and development should be gender-sensitive and user-driven.
5. Women's innovation potential is underutilized - to benefit their societies, empowering women to fully contribute to science and technology knowledge and production must become a priority.

Women must be encouraged to have equal access to ICT training and education as well as the new employment and entrepreneurial opportunities generated by ICTs. Women globally are

challenging gender stereotypes about ICT users and demanding the right to participate in ICT research and development. Women are also using ICT to build awareness—and as recent events have shown so vividly—joining with others to reshape history.

I look forward to a rich exchange of views on these topics, which, I trust, will help you reach consensus on a focused set of action-oriented policy recommendations. These agreed conclusions reflect Member States' commitment, but they are only a first step. These commitments, must be followed-up at the national level. UN Women and the entire UN system at country level stand ready to work with you to support efforts to implement the agreed conclusions of this CSW.

A second focus of this session is the review of progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on “The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child”, which this Commission adopted at its fifty-first session in 2007.

We know that ending discrimination and violence against the girl child requires comprehensive strategies that create an enabling and supportive environment for girls, so that girls can fully develop their potential, enjoy their right to education and live healthy lives free of violence. What measures have been taken to translate the 2007 agreed conclusions into practice? What was their impact? What strategies have proven effective to ensure girls receive sufficient attention in policy and programme development and resource allocation? How can continuing challenges be addressed? This discussion is an opportunity to address these questions and focus on ways to bridge the implementation gap and accelerate action.

The emerging issue selected for this year's session, “gender equality and sustainable development”, provides a strategic opportunity for this Commission to influence debates of global significance. By selecting this topic, this Commission created an excellent opportunity to ensure that a gender perspective is systematically woven into the preparatory process leading up to the Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20), which will be held in 2012.

I am also very pleased that you will give special attention to “eliminating preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and the empowerment of women”, in a panel discussion with the participation of a number of UN entities and other stakeholders. This discussion will be an opportunity for the Commission to assess progress in addressing maternal mortality, identify good practices and successful interventions, as well as ways and means for further accelerating action with the aim of measurably reducing and eliminating maternal mortality, and achieving MDG 5. It will also be an opportunity to bring further impetus to implementation of the Secretary-General's *Global strategy for women's and children's health*.

Chair,  
Distinguished delegates,

I would like to call your attention to a number of other reports that are before the Commission under this agenda item, including the report on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women which covers the period from October 2009 to September 2010 and the report on women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS. I also refer you to the joint workplan of UN Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and to the report on the activities of the UN Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence against Women, which UN Women manages on behalf of the UN system. Members of the Commission will receive a note by the Secretary-General transmitting the list of confidential communications concerning the status of women and responses thereto.

The General Assembly has mandated the Secretary-General to provide an oral report to this Commission on the improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system. As a standard setting organization, the UN has a particular responsibility to achieve gender balance and to lead by example. While the current target is gender balance at all levels in all occupational groups by 2000, and by 2015 for certain positions such as Special Representatives and envoys of the Secretary-General, we still need to do more. Gender balance has been achieved only at the P-1 and P-2 levels. Women constitute only 28.4 percent of staff at the D-1 level and above and 32.3, 37.8 and 44.1 percent at the P-5, P-4 and P-3 levels respectively.

A system-wide survey has identified a number of constraints for reaching gender balance, including inadequate accountability, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms; lack of special measures for gender equality; weak implementation of flexible working arrangements; insufficient outreach; and low numbers of qualified women applicants.

The Secretary-General's report, contained in document A/65/334 on the Improvement in the Status of Women in the United Nations System, provides recommendations on how to overcome these challenges, including: the need for senior leadership sponsorship, enhanced monitoring and accountability and more rigorous implementation of existing policies including special measures for women and flexible working arrangements.

UN Women will work to implement the agenda of equal representation of women in the UN system through strategic leadership in coordination, advocacy, policy development, and implementation and accountability.

I hope to meet many of you in the coming two weeks - it is your political will and your commitment that helped create UN Women and we rely on your support to deliver on the expectations of many of our stakeholders.

As Executive Director of UN Women, let me assure you that together with my staff, I will do my utmost to support the critical work of this Commission, and in the follow-up to the session, so that you can complete your agenda and achieve the results you are aiming for - in a new era of equality between women and men and boys and girls. This is the goal that must be within our reach. This is why we are here.

I look forward to an inspiring two weeks. Thank you.