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INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium
Development Goals for women and girls**

OPENING SPEECH

by

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Madam Chair, distinguished panelists, and delegates to the Commission on the Status of Women,

It gives me great pleasure to open this important panel that we hope will catalyze discussion and debate on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls, and begin shaping the agenda for next year's CSW session.

Today's discussion that we carry forward to the 58th session is essential for shaping the post-2015 development framework.

Just a few weeks ago I was in Copenhagen for the Addressing Inequalities Global Consultations, where we discussed the successes and shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals.

It has become clear that exclusion, discrimination and violence against women and girls remain some of the biggest obstacles to sustainable development. Progress to 2015 and beyond will largely depend on success in tackling inequalities, ending violence and discrimination against women and girls, and promoting justice and equality for all.

The MDGs have shown us that global consensus is possible. And they have achieved many positive results.

Maternal deaths have been cut by a nearly 50 percent since 1990.

Globally, we have achieved gender parity in primary education.

By the end of 2010, 6.5 million people were receiving antiretroviral treatment for HIV and AIDS, an increase of more than 25 per cent compared to 2009.

Just over half, 53 percent, of all women who need this treatment now have access to it.

The proportion of people without access to safe drinking water has been cut in half, with wide-ranging benefits for many, including women and girls who no longer need to spend their days collecting water for their families, and have clean water to fight disease and infection.

But what we have also learned from the MDGs is that averages often mask wide disparities between different groups of women and girls.

Our focus on numbers distracted us from addressing the deeper, structural causes of poverty and inequality.

In too many countries, women and girls continue to be left behind.

The poorest women, those in rural areas, women who belong to ethnic or religious minorities, and young women, are too often denied the rights that some women take for granted.

The success of MDG 5, to improve maternal health has varied greatly. What also varies greatly is women's access to reproductive health services depending on age, location, ethnicity or income.

It is still the case that every year, 287,000 women die from childbirth-related causes, 99 percent of them in developing countries.

From a human rights perspective, indeed from any basic moral standpoint, it is unacceptable that because of these disparities, women continue to die of preventable causes.

We also see that girls' access to secondary education is still very limited in many regions of the world, even though we know how important these extra years of schooling are for equal opportunities and participation in society.

In an attempt to achieve gender parity, enrolment rates in education were often given priority over quality in education.

There was little focus on the causes of high drop-out rates among adolescent girls, or the risk of sexual violence and other human rights violations that keep girls from attending and finishing school, and thus need to be addressed.

Despite some progress on halting the spread of HIV and AIDS, every year, nearly 600,000 young women are newly infected with HIV.

Over half the people in the world living with AIDS are women, and young women aged 15 to 24 continue to have HIV infection rates twice as high as young men.

And when it comes to the priority theme of this session, ending violence against women, this is the missing MDG that must be included in any new development framework.

As many of you know, UN Women recently hosted an expert group meeting on gender perspectives on the post-2015 development agenda, which brought together more than 60 diverse experts from all over the world.

And their voices were clear: any new framework must be *even stronger* on achieving gender equality.

We need a stand-alone goal on gender equality with gender mainstreamed across all other goals.

So, in these final years before 2015, let us not forget the commitments we made at the turn of the new millennium.

Now is the time to listen to the voices of women, to fully engage women, and to make women's empowerment and gender equality a priority now, and in the post-2015 global development framework.

We are making progress and UN Women stands beside you as we move forward for women's empowerment and gender equality.

I thank you and look forward to our discussions.