

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Fifty-eighth Session**

Introductory Statement

by

**Ms. Angela E.V. King
Assistant Secretary-General**

Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women

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Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and friends,

It is an honour and privilege to address the Third Committee as it discusses the advancement of women. I would like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. Chairperson, on your well-deserved election to guide this Committee. My congratulations also go to the other members of the Bureau.

This Committee's deliberations take place at a crucial time. As the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, pointed out in his address to the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, the United Nations has come to a fork in the road – with one path leading towards true revitalization and effectiveness, the other towards disappointment and despair.

The dramatic events of 2003 – the heightened international tension and the threat of terrorism, the bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad with the loss of close friends and colleagues, slow progress in development, plummeting life expectancy in countries affected by HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation and the impasse at trade talks in Cancun – have raised questions about the future direction and role of the United Nations and our global work for peace, development and gender equality.

Mr. Annan's rallying cry was reemphasized by the President of the General Assembly, H.E. Ambassador Julian Hunte, who stressed that as the United Nations is now challenged by an extraordinary set of circumstances, "We must affirm the central role of the United Nations, the most important multilateral organization ever established."

For us, in this Committee and in the Secretariat, the United Nations is still very relevant and vitally important.

If we pull together within a common framework, we will break through this period of doubt and uncertainty and find the way forward once more. Three years ago at the Millennium Summit, world leaders provided such a common framework in the Millennium Declaration. They committed themselves to address common threats collectively and promote human rights and

democracy. Emerging from these commitments are the Millennium Development Goals, with key targets to be met by 2015. These targets include halving the numbers living in extreme poverty, eliminating hunger, ensuring that all children, girls as well as boys, finish primary school; eliminating gender discrimination; drastically reducing the rates of maternal and child mortality; halting the spread of HIV/AIDS, ensuring environmental sustainability and building stronger partnerships.

As part of the reform process, a new architecture for international dialogue ushered in by General Assembly resolution 57/270, the intergovernmental calendar now includes a series of events in 2005, the major one being a conference to review all commitments made in the Millennium Declaration and its goals.

The challenge for this Committee is how to use this architecture and the events planned so as to ensure that gender perspectives are fully integrated. The events during 2005 include, in addition to the conference on the Millennium Declaration, reviews and appraisals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Outcome Document of the Twenty-third special session of the General Assembly; of the Copenhagen World Summit on Social Development; and of the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development, and the biennial High-Level Event.

We anticipate, in the spirit of General Assembly resolution 57/270, that the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Outcome Document of Beijing +5 will be on three levels in 2005. It will be taken up first by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session, based on the in-depth analysis of government responses to a questionnaire prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in collaboration with the regional commissions. Governments will thus have only one set of answers to prepare by April 2004 (for both DAW and the respective regional commission). In addition, the Economic and Social Council will look at themes cutting across several global summits and conferences (for example, reproductive health, poverty reduction) while other more policy-related issues may be taken up at the level of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session. The modalities have yet to be worked out.

Mr. Chairperson,

We would welcome this Committee's views on what should be the main areas of focus at the various levels and what delegations wish to derive from these events.

I will now turn to some of the challenges. These include globalization, human rights, violence against women and trafficking, women in decision-making, peace and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. When opening this Committee, Mr. José Antonio Ocampo placed the work on gender, social and human rights issues squarely within the broader context of global development stressing that "the challenge is to ensure that growth is equitable, inclusive, pro-development and supportive of equality between men and women."

Globalization, a first and central challenge of global development, must be harnessed to become a positive force for the benefit of all the world's people. Many negative aspects still exist. For example, two recent reports: the 2003 Human Development Report: Millennium Development Goals: A Compact Among Nations to End Human Poverty argues that while

globalization contributed to economic growth and poverty reduction in much of the world, it has bypassed hundreds of millions, especially women and girl and the World Bank's recent report, Gender Equality and the MDGs also finds a clear link between gender inequality and poverty.

Another publication, the 2003 Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals, prepared by the Commonwealth Secretariat similarly states that when it comes to poverty, gender inequality is more pervasive than other forms of inequality because it intersects with economic deprivation thus producing more intensified forms of poverty for women than men. Only by expanding women's access to assets – secure land tenure, tools, knowledge and credit, and labour intensive exports and small enterprises – can countries widen women's share in positive growth.

In this context the follow up to the Monterrey Consensus with regard to gender perspectives is vital. Also in support of women's economic empowerment, a recent initiative of UNCTAD, assisted by WTO, ITC, UNIDO and others to launch the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) Task Force on Gender and Trade to ensure gender perspectives in UNCTAD XI (Sao Paolo, June 2004) should be welcomed and supported by Member States.

Women's full enjoyment of their **human rights** is a second challenge. Since the Beijing Conference, 23 States Parties ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), bringing the total number of States Parties to 174. The four most recent ratifications – Afghanistan, Syrian Arab Republic, Timor Leste and Sao Tomé and Príncipe – came in rapid succession between March and June this year. I would appeal to the 15 or so Member States who have not ratified the CEDAW Convention to do so by 2005. The number of ratifications to the Optional Protocol now stands at 56. This number should also be increased.

All those who struggle to achieve the rights of women and children in countries around the world must be greatly heartened by the news that this year's Nobel Prize for Peace was awarded to Ms. Shirin Ebadi, a woman lawyer from Iran. This Prize is a personal triumph for her but also spells recognition of a group of unsung heroes strategically and convincingly fighting for women's human rights in their countries around the world.

Women continue to face varying degrees of **violence** in all its forms – a third challenge. According to the World Health Organization's latest report, World Report on Violence and Health 10 to 69 per cent of women around the world reported being subjected to some form of violence in their lifetime.

We have many norms and declarations condemning violence against women. The Beijing+5 Outcome Document urges that legislation and mechanisms to handle criminal matters relating to violence against women and girls should be introduced and strengthened. Above all, that Document called for zero tolerance to violence against women. Here is an opportunity where Member States can really focus on practical implementation and report on their concrete actions in answering the questionnaire to be analysed in 2005.

Trafficking in women and girls is a particularly heinous form of violence. The International Organization for Migration in its report, World Migration 2003: Managing

Migration, Challenges and Responses for People on the Move estimates that some 700,000 persons are trafficked each year across international borders. The majority are women and girls, usually in their teens or early twenties. Member States, regional groups, the United Nations system and civil society now have a strong instrument to combat this scourge through the entry into force on 29 September 2003 of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Its Protocol to Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, will enter into force on 25 December 2003.

Any list of major challenges would be incomplete without mentioning the deadly impact of HIV/AIDS on women. The **HIV/AIDS pandemic** reached catastrophic proportions threatening whole nations with extinction, especially in Southern Africa. Since I started speaking a few minutes ago, more than 90 women and men have died from this deadly pandemic. The disease is spreading faster among women and girls and is inextricably linked to violence, abuse and women's status in society.

To date, the efforts of the international community to reverse the rate of spread of HIV/AIDS proved to be largely unsuccessful with only 300,000 infected women and men out of 42 million receiving assistance. Last September, WHO set an ambitious goal to provide anti-retroviral drugs to 3 million infected by 2005. I call on Member States to support this initiative, both materially and politically, and also to make every effort to change laws, policies and practices which increase women's empowerment and their capacity to protect themselves against infection.

Finally, more effort is needed to change the situation in other critical areas – women in **decision-making** and in the **peace process**.

Women are still severely under-represented in higher-level echelons. There are only 10 women Heads of State and Government, five women vice-presidents and four women leaders of the main opposition parties in their countries. Women in the world's Parliaments account for only 15.3 per cent. On a more positive note we welcome the African Union's election of 50 per cent women Commissioners, a prime example of Africa's commitment to gender equality.

Whilst numbers of women in cabinet level may be growing in some countries, recent deplorable and tragic attacks on two outstanding women, Anna Lindh, Foreign Minister of Sweden and Akila Al-Hashimi, a senior member of the Iraqi Governing Council and one of three women on the Council, show that the idea of women in leadership positions is still not widely accepted.

If we look at women in leadership positions at the United Nations, there are fewer women heads of organizations. Of the major agencies, funds and programmes, only UNICEF and UNFPA are headed by women as WHO, UNHCR and WFP are now headed by men. At the United Nations Secretariat, there are five women Under-Secretaries-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, two head Regional Commissions (ECE and ESCWA) and two head the Department of Management and Habitat, respectively. Four women are Assistant Secretaries-General. Only one woman heads a peace mission. Of 191 Member States at the United Nations, there are only eight women Permanent Representatives.

Both at the United Nations and the United Nations system, women professionals remain at approximately 35 per cent far short of the 50 per cent target. For the Secretariat, this figure has remained the same over a five-year period indicating that recruitments are barely replacing retirements and separations. Recruitment of women this year only reached 38 per cent level while the target is 50 per cent. Perhaps one of the statistics of greatest concern is that the pool of middle-level professional women at the P-4 and P-5 levels is actually declining. We need Member States and regional groups, particularly in Eastern Europe, Western Asia, the Pacific and Africa, to encourage more women to apply for specific posts for which they are qualified.

A related area is the role of **women in peace processes**. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) gave great impetus to incorporating gender perspectives in, for example, the assessment missions to Iraq and Liberia, into Security Council missions to West Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and references to women and gender mainstreaming are beginning to appear in Council resolutions. There is greater awareness among Special Representatives of the Secretary-General of the need to promote gender mainstreaming in the missions.

Worthy of mention as an example of successful coordination between the United Nations system and multilateral organizations in this area is the Workshop on Gender and Post-conflict Reconstruction: Lessons Learned from Afghanistan, held in Paris, July 2003 organized jointly by the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and the OECD/DAC Network on Gender Equality and co-chaired by the Netherlands and myself as IANWGE chair.

To mark the third anniversary of the historic resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security, a week of events culminating in a panel on Friday, 31 October 2003, is being planned. We look to Member States, both in the Security Council and this Committee, to ensure that this momentum, particularly in the conflict areas is further accelerated and that women truly participate as actors in all levels of these processes. We look forward to your active participation in the events.

Distinguished delegates,

To meet these challenges, gender mainstreaming through the 60-member Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality continues to be our major strategy and we work with the Secretariat's departments and offices and United Nations entities to incorporate gender aspects into substantive work. A series of briefing notes, gender action plans, gender audits and gender policies by sectors have been developed by substantive United Nations entities and departments (for example, DDA and OCHA), some, in cooperation with my Office. Two regional symposia on gender mainstreaming will be held in ESCWA and ECE, respectively, in collaboration with my Office, for Member States of the regions to review and exchange methodologies and best practices and set new goals in gender mainstreaming.

Co-ordination among the Secretariat and agencies, funds and programmes remains robust. We had a productive meeting of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality in February 2003 setting new targets and creating new task forces. In the intersessional period, the members of the Network are collaborating on-line and in person to develop methodologies and competencies for gender perspectives in such wide-ranging areas as MDGs, water for the Year of Fresh Water; trade; peace and security; gender mainstreaming in

programme budgets and ICTs, the latter to be integrated into the final outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society in December 2003.

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) is set out in the report before you (A/58/417). INSTRAW has continued to carry out a very modest programme due to financial constraints. With the cooperation of the Working Group on the Future Operation of INSTRAW, qualified candidates at the D-2 level for the vacant post of Director of the Institute, have been identified and the procedures for appointment are proceeding. A separate report on the financial situation is being prepared by our colleagues in the Secretariat and will be available shortly.

Distinguished delegates,

Gender equality is the responsibility of all of us. We are collectively accountable for progress and change. Whether it is the establishment of programmes to support women's sustainable livelihoods and economic independence or the elimination of discriminatory legislation, protection of women from sexual violence, the adoption of measures to increase women's participation in public life and decision-making or an improved access to health care: we must take responsibility for initiating such change and to see it towards its successful outcome.

The task ahead of you, particularly leading to 2005, will not always be easy. It will require commitment and compromise. Above all it requires that you never lose sight of the ultimate goal that is to make a difference in the lives of women and girls in your countries. We are looking forward to your guidance and advice. As I close, may I urge you to choose the Secretary-General's first path – the one leading towards true revitalization and effectiveness of all our programmes.

Mr. Chairperson, let me assure you of my personal commitment and support for the work of this Committee. I also pledge the support of my Office, the Division of the Advancement of Women and the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality. I am confident that in partnership we will be able to close this session with a sense of satisfaction as yet another big step forward to our common task – true equality between women and men.

Thank you.
