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**GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Sixty-third session
Introductory Statement
by
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Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and friends,

It is an honour and privilege to address the Third Committee as it discusses the advancement of women. May I warmly congratulate you, Mr. Chairperson, on your election and the other Bureau members. I would also like to thank Ambassador Raymond Wolfe of Jamaica, and members of the outgoing bureau, for their able stewardship which guided the deliberations of this Committee to a fruitful conclusion during the 62nd session of the General Assembly.

Our discussion today is taking place in the psychological shadow of multiple crises. The confluence of major threats such as outbreaks of conflict and violence, projected global economic slowdown, the global financial, food and energy crises, likely increase in unemployment, natural disasters and emergencies, global warming and continued lack of progress in trade talks would have serious adverse impact on the progress being made towards achieving the goals of the 2005 Millennium World Summit, including towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

But we are also in the midst of several transitions - political, economic and social - emphasizing innovative and, most importantly, collaborative action. Despite many obstacles and challenges, political reform, democratic change and political participation increasingly take root in the world. Improved governance and economic management in many developing countries contribute to an enabling environment for the mobilization of resources, domestic and external. Millions of people are lifted from abject poverty and hunger. Highly effective collaborative strategies have been deployed against malaria and HIV/AIDS. Progress in furthering the African Green Revolution, better emergency obstetric care, safer delivery and neonatal survival, better schooling for girls, the use of information and communication technology to reduce poverty and improved women's rights and their greater economic empowerment, government and private sector partnerships and the increasingly active role of civil society save millions of lives and

make this world safer and more prosperous.

What has helped this progress?

First, as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon pointed out in his introductory statement at this session of the Assembly “the foundation of all our work is accountability.” It is clear that without mutual accountability international cooperation would be impossible. To harness global aid for effective development, in the same way as developing countries need to meet their commitments to implement sound domestic policies for reaching the goals, as outlined at the Millennium Summit and later as part of the Monterrey consensus, so too, donors urgently need to keep their commitments to support developing country efforts. The same applies to all other areas of peace, development and human rights, as well as to commitments of governments, the United Nations system and civil society towards women.

Second, in the face of all these crises, a call for collective action has never been so vital. As today’s financial crisis shows, in a globalized and ever more interdependent environment, where States are less able than ever before to insulate themselves from events around them, the world would be more secure only if it takes collective action.

Third, our untapped resources are immense - more than half the world's population has been excluded in the strategies of international development and security. To engage those resources requires a fundamental shift in our thinking. We must create a new paradigm in our policies - a model of inclusive development and security. In short, it must become unthinkable not to have women integrally involved in every stage of the development and peace processes.

We need faster, more flexible and effective coordination and response mechanisms to deal with the crises. Member States made multi-billion interventions to fix their financial systems and capital markets. Global economic and social problems, including poverty, hunger, maternal mortality, violence and others demand no less attention. I am sure that both developed and developing countries will benefit from more coordinated action. And the United Nations provides a framework for world wide coordination.

During this year, the United Nations has been at the forefront of global work to meet the challenges and strengthen mutual accountability, collective action and inclusiveness. Member States, United Nations entities, international organizations, civil society and the private sector took an active part in the High-Level Event on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); the high-level plenary meeting “Africa’s development needs: state of implementation of various commitments, challenges and the way forward”; the third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra; the climate change negotiations; the on-going preparations for the Follow-up International Conference on the Monterrey Consensus in Doha and the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; as well as the resumed review of the report of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence in the areas of

development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. The 2008 substantive session of ECOSOC emphasized the importance of gender equality to implementation of the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development.

Millennium Development Goals

I am very encouraged by the strong sense of commitment and political will that Governments showed during the MDG review attended by 96 heads of state or government. I would like in particular, to thank the Prime Minister of Denmark and the President of Liberia for hosting on 25 September 2008, the Partnership Event on “Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women: a prerequisite for achieving all MDGs by 2015”. The event demonstrated that with this commitment, a shared vision and strong partnerships, we can overcome obstacles and achieve MDG3 as well as other MDGs.

The *2008 Millennium Development Goals Report* prepared by the Interagency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators led by DESA made it clear that despite impressive gains in girls’ education, they account for 55 per cent of the out of school population. Women have more income earning opportunities than ever before. Overall they occupy almost 40 per cent of all paid jobs outside agriculture compared to 35 per cent in 1990. But almost two thirds of women in the developing world work in vulnerable jobs as own account and unpaid family workers. Although well educated women have advanced and the share of women managers is increasing, most women remain in low status, less valued jobs and face great barriers to higher level positions.

Overall, I am concerned that MDG3 has been, during this review, much lower on the radar than many other MDGs. I call for greater focus on this Goal which is critical because—although valuable in its own right as an important development objective—it is also key to achieving all the others.

Financing for gender equality and women’s empowerment

The MDGs will not be met unless greater attention and resources are devoted to women’s empowerment and gender equality. At the country level, promising policy initiatives for gender equality and women’s empowerment often flounder because insufficient resources are allocated to implement them.

As demands for accelerated translation of all commitments made at the major UN conferences and summits into concrete actions increase, the debate on how the financing for gender equality agenda can be harnessed acquires a new importance and significance. The Monterrey Consensus in 2002, while recognizing gender equality, women’s empowerment and poverty eradication as development goals, provided little in the way of concrete action plans or specific policy recommendations to address any of these goals.

The fifty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women devoted its priority theme to financing for gender equality and women's empowerment. The agreed conclusions of the Commission on the theme (document E/CN.6/2008/L.8) provide guidance and innovative ways for strengthening financing for gender equality and women's empowerment.

If gender equality and women's empowerment are vital to development, then they must be fully resourced. The Doha process should explicitly make it clear. It is also critical that the current financial crisis should not derail the ongoing work to reach MDGs, including gender equality.

Human rights

2008 is a landmark year not only in the global campaign to make financing for development a reality but it also marks 60 years since the birth of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This anniversary reminds us that much more needs to be done to make the promise of universal, indivisible human rights a reality for all women and men. No country of the world can claim it has eliminated discrimination against women. Thus, our fight for women's rights is not only an initiative of governments, but is the common goal of people everywhere. In the run-up to the 60th anniversary, we should all carry the message of the Universal Declaration to every region of the world that women's rights are universal, indivisible human rights and make them a reality. I call on you to continue to support the CEDAW Committee and work with it to galvanize action for women's rights.

Violence against women

Violence against women - one of the most extreme manifestations of pervasive violations of women's human rights - is now high on the international agenda. On 25 February 2008, at the opening of the Commission on the Status of Women at United Nations Headquarters, the Secretary-General launched the Campaign *Unite to End Violence against Women*. The launch of this Campaign represents an historic opportunity to galvanize action on one of the most widespread human rights violations in the world.

At the launch of his Campaign, the Secretary-General called on Member States to take action including enacting legislation to eliminate violence against women. I congratulate the Government of the Republic of San Marino for having enacted Law No. 97 entitled "Prevention and elimination of violence against women and gender violence" in June 2008. I also congratulate the Government of Brazil for declaring 6 December as National day to eliminate violence against women and welcome the Government's decision to host in March 2009, a Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality to address among other subjects, violence against women. I encourage all Member States to initiate action in support of the Secretary-General's Campaign "Unite to end Violence against Women". The United Nations system stands ready to collaborate with you as appropriate.

The work of this Committee has greatly contributed to the global momentum leading up to the launch of the Secretary-General's Campaign, including the General Assembly Resolutions on intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (62/133) and on eliminating rape and other forms of sexual violence in all their manifestations, including in conflict and related situations (62/134). On 19 June, the Security Council adopted its resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

Despite these commitments by Member States and the UN system, violence against women continues unabated. It occurs in all countries at all stages of development, and threatens the rights and well-being of women. As many as one in three women are beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in their lifetime. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by conflict and other emergency situations, and face the high risk of sexual violence. The violence that women and girls suffer in war establishes patterns of violence that remain and impede recovery many years after conflicts end. The majority of the hundreds of thousands of people trafficked each year are women and children. Violence against women accelerates the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Much more needs to be done by all - Member States, international and regional organizations, civil society, the private sector, women and men - to end violence against women.

Women's representation

Women are slowly gaining ground in representation in political and public life, including the legislature, policy-making and administrative positions in public and private-sector employment, trade unions and the judiciary. The global proportion of parliamentary seats held by women reached 18 per cent.

I congratulate the women of Rwanda for their impressive success in the recent elections that gave them a majority - 56 per cent of seats - in the National Assembly. Rwanda is followed by Sweden, Finland and Argentina. Data available to the Inter-parliamentary Union indicates that while in August 1999 only 14 States had 25 per cent of women in parliaments, today they are 35.

Despite greater parliamentary participation, women are largely absent from the highest levels of governance. In only 11 out of 192 Member States do women occupy the highest positions of State. Overall, only 16 per cent of the world's ministerial positions are held by women. Only three countries: Finland, Norway and Grenada exceeded or reached 50/50 gender distribution in ministerial positions. Thirteen countries had no women at all in cabinet positions. Women holding ministerial rank also remained concentrated in the social affairs, women and family affairs, education, environment, employment and - for the first time in history - in foreign affairs portfolios. Information on women's participation at the local level of government remains sketchy, but almost everywhere in the world women are not present at the local levels in proportion to their presence in the population.

In the United Nations itself, progress in improving the representation of women at the professional and policy-making levels has been slower than anticipated. Very briefly, as of 1 January 2008, the percentage of women in professional and higher posts in the UN system was at 38.4 per cent, only 3 per cent higher than what it was almost a decade ago. Of the 31 UN entities, only two (UNFPA and UNITAR) achieved overall gender balance among Professional and higher level staff while seven entities had less than 30 per cent women on their staff as of December 2007.

In the UN Secretariat, the percentage of women in the Professional and higher categories showed a negligible improvement of 0.2 per cent during the two-year period 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2008, increasing from 37.4 to 37.6 per cent. This slow pace of growth is due to weak accountability, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, weak integration of focal point systems within departments, insufficient outreach, low numbers of qualified women applicants, and lack of adequate data on the causes of attrition for women.

The Secretary-General is taking measures to rectify these deficiencies through establishing mechanisms at the senior management level and including indicators in performance appraisals for managers. In the Secretariat, human resources action plans are in use and a forward-looking gender balance strategy and scorecard, to be reviewed by the Management Committee twice yearly, are under development. Managers will be evaluated on their goal achievement through the scorecard. Similar actions are being taken by other UN entities.

Regrettably, the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system is yet to be issued. An advance unedited copy is available on WomenWatch website (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/documents/ga63.htm>).

Distinguished delegates,

Interagency coordination

During the past year the United Nations system has taken further steps to strengthen gender mainstreaming in its policies and programmes. The Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE), representing more than thirty UN entities continues to be the center of concerted UN action on gender mainstreaming. The Network's mandates are prominent in many resolutions of the General Assembly and ECOSOC on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The Network continues to make progress in the operationalization of the system-wide policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women and strategy on gender mainstreaming adopted by the Chief Executives Board in October 2006. In particular, the Network adopted the draft Standards for the System-wide policy and strategy for normative activities and the UNCT Performance Indicators for Gender Equality and

Women's Empowerment for operational activities. The Standards and the Performance Indicators would ensure a coherent, results based and effective approach to gender mainstreaming both at Headquarters and in the field.

Reflecting the challenge of system-wide coherence, the Network prioritized system-wide programmes for capacity building of all staff, gender experts and senior management.

An important feature of the Network has been the close collaboration with the OECD/DAC Network on Gender Equality. Joint workshops with the Working Party have provided critical opportunities for discussions at policy and operational level on a range of cutting edge topics. At the latest workshop held in Paris in January 2008, both Networks discussed the partnerships of multilateral and bilateral agencies in scaling up support to partner country efforts to achieve gender equality.

System-wide coherence

Finally, on the system-wide coherence review, allow me to first congratulate the Co-Chairs on System-wide Coherence, Ambassador Kavanagh of Ireland and Ambassador Mahiga of the United Republic of Tanzania for their commitment and skillful conduct of the intergovernmental consultations on system-wide coherence.

On 16 May, 16 June and 8 September 2008, informal consultations of the General Assembly were held on the strengthening of gender equality work of the UN system. Two papers prepared through extensive interagency collaboration under the auspices of the Deputy Secretary-General and in broad consultation with civil society were submitted to Member States by the Deputy Secretary-General. The first one dated 5 June 2008 on the UN system support to Member States on gender equality and women's empowerment and the second dated 23 July 2008 on institutional options to strengthen the UN work on gender equality and women's empowerment, discussed substantive and programmatic aspects of UN support to countries and provided in a non-prescriptive way, an analysis of four institutional options for strengthening the work of the UN system.

Member States agreed that gaps and weaknesses of UN support to countries should be effectively addressed. While it was not possible for the Assembly to agree on one option which should provide an optimal response to the challenges identified by Member States and also fulfill the mandates they have been given, most delegations expressed support for the "composite" entity.

On 12 September 2008, the Assembly adopted its resolution on "System-wide coherence" 62/277, requesting the Secretary-General to provide a further, detailed modalities paper in respect of the options set out in the paper of 23 July 2008. It is expected that the paper will address among other aspects, funding, governance structure, staffing, specific functions and relationship with the Commission on the Status of Women and other relevant bodies. The preparation of the paper will be guided by the

totality of views expressed by Member States in the informal plenary consultations, focusing in particular on the “composite entity” option.

Mr. Chairperson,

I look to this session of the Assembly to chart new grounds to allow us to move faster towards effective, coordinated action to advance the status of the world’s women in keeping with the commitments made at Beijing and the 2005 World Summit.

On behalf of my Office and the Division for the Advancement of Women as well as the Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, I would like to pledge our full cooperation with delegations to moving forward our work on the advancement of women. We look forward to your guidance and advice as contributions to the critical work of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.
