



Sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly
Item 28, Advancement of women

Introductory statement by

Ms. Lakshmi Puri
Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director for
Intergovernmental Support and Strategic Partnerships
UN-Women

10 October 2011

Chair,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and friends,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to address the Third Committee of the General Assembly on the advancement of women, and to present the reports of the Secretary-General that have been prepared by UN-Women for this item. I congratulate you, Chair, and the other Bureau members on your election, and assure you of the full support of UN-Women in the discharge of your responsibilities.

Last year at this time, the newly appointed Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms Michelle Bachelet, addressed this Committee, a few days after assuming her functions as the first head of the new Entity. The establishment of UN-Women, by the General Assembly and Ms Bachelet's appointment were key events in a remarkable year for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. We commemorated the anniversaries of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of Security Council resolution 1325. The Economic and Social Council's Ministerial Declaration strengthened the global commitments for gender equality and women's empowerment. The Secretary-General launched the *Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health* to save the lives of millions of women and children.

At all these meetings and events, stakeholders committed to intensify efforts to close the persistent implementation gaps between commitments and women's daily lives and realities; between women's rights in the law and their enjoyment of those rights in practice; between existing empowerment policies and strategies and women's actual wellbeing and security.

All stakeholders – Member States, the UN system, civil society, the private sector – have been faced with the challenge of sustaining the strong momentum of 2010 and turn the opportunities generated into clear and tangible gains for women and girls everywhere.

When the Secretary-General presented his perspective on the way ahead to the 66th General Assembly, he stressed that we can dramatically advance our efforts in every sphere by working with – and working for, women [and young people], as one of the five imperatives – five generational opportunities to shape the world of tomorrow by the decisions we make today.

We have many good indications that we are moving in the right direction. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are increasingly on the agenda of heads of state and government, as we were able to witness during this year's general debate, the first in the history of the Organization to be opened by a woman, Her Excellency President Dilma Roussef of Brazil. During the debate, world leaders highlighted women's indispensable role as agents and beneficiaries of development and in peace processes, and their contributions to conflict prevention and resolution. They voiced commitments to end violence against women and for the protection of women's human rights. They presented examples of legislative reforms to end discrimination, and to increase the

number of women in political office and public life. To reinforce this commitment, an extraordinary group of women heads of state and other government leaders joined with Ms Bachelet in a call for increasing women's political participation and decision-making across the world, which is a key area of work of UN-Women. The leaders signed on to a joint statement on ways to advance women's political participation, and we are committed to helping translate those into concrete results.

As we have seen from the events of the "Arab Spring," women have been actively involved in organizing and demanding political freedoms and dignity. Women from all walks of life are joining the calls for democracy. They are working to achieve full parity in the assemblies and bodies that are shaping the future of their countries. Their contribution makes clear that democracy will remain incomplete as long as half the population does not enjoy full and equal participation and citizenship rights.

And we all rejoiced when the winners of the Nobel Peace Prize were announced last Friday, awarded to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkul Karman for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work. This award is a ringing acknowledgement of what women have been demanding for years: the equal involvement of women in all peace, security and democracy decisions. Women's involvement is central for achieving lasting peace and stability and yet, too often, they are excluded from the negotiating table. As Ms Bachelet said in her message celebrating this achievement, UN-Women stands beside women around the world who are demanding that their voices be heard and they have equal participation in decision-making.

At the same time, it is with deep sorrow and sadness that all of us at UN-Women grieve the loss of Wangari Muta Maathai, an environmentalist, politician, professor and human rights activist.

We join people in Africa and around the world in mourning her death, and celebrating her life, as a remarkable leader who was the first African woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Professor Maathai took a courageous stand, enduring harassment and brutality, to protect the environment and advance the rights of women, combating desertification, water shortages and rural hunger.

Chair,

There is enormous excitement and an explosion of expectations about UN-Women. The Entity has fully assumed its leadership position and is working together with the UN system, and with Government and civil society partners around the world to seize the opportunities generated here at the United Nations and around the world. Much progress has been accomplished in UN-Women's institutional consolidation, also thanks to the action taken by this Assembly late last year and by the Executive Board of UN-Women in early January on our 2011 budgets. We have aligned our staff resources, especially here at Headquarters, and are now turning our attention to strengthening our field presence.

We have devoted significant efforts to positioning UN-Women as a catalyst for change. We are focusing on building partnerships, cutting edge analysis, strategic presence and high level advocacy and leadership. We chose to focus our first flagship report on the important subject of women's access to justice because we recognize that effective systems of justice are a foundation for gender equality and women's full enjoyment of their human rights. Reforms to bring legislation into compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are a key step. And so are policy measures to close gaps in the justice chain when women seek to obtain redress. Our work on ending violence against women is producing tangible legislative, institutional and implementation changes on the ground. I have seen the demonstrable effectiveness of one-stop crisis centres for women survivors of violence during a recent visit to Thailand. The support from our Trust Fund to End Violence against Women helps expand such centres and broadens women's access to protection, support, justice and redress.

In order to move forward our women's economic empowerment agenda, we have organized jointly with the Canadian International Development Agency a global conference and we stand ready to take bold action so that women's economic empowerment becomes a shared and living reality.

To expand our partnerships, we concluded an agreement with WFP to work with countries to achieve food and nutrition security. And we are working with the Rome-based agencies in preparation for next year's session of the Commission on the Status of Women to make it a high-impact event to strengthen the role of women in rural areas. Indeed, these partnerships are part of our continuing effort to coordinate and strengthen gender mainstreaming and gender-specific programming in the UN system and to work collaboratively along a wide range of sectors and policy areas.

Distinguished delegates,

UN-Women has continued to support intergovernmental deliberations and decision-making. Indeed, one of our six goals is to support intergovernmental processes in a way that a comprehensive set of global norms, policies and standards on gender equality and women's empowerment is in place that is dynamic, responds to new and emerging issues, challenges and opportunities and provides a firm basis for action by Governments and other stakeholders at all levels. The General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on the Status of Women are primary bodies where this is being pursued and which UN-Women supports. We are also proactively working to identify key intergovernmental negotiations and norm-setting fora where we would strategically support the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment dimensions in processes and outcomes.

We are currently contributing to a number of processes, such as climate change, and the Rio + 20 preparations, that offer key opportunities for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. These must not be missed. UN-Women stands ready to support Member States in this regard.

As I am sharing this podium with the Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, let me also stress UN-Women's ongoing support for the implementation of the Convention and the Committee's concluding observations at the national level.

Chair

Distinguished delegates.

At the same time, we are committed to ensuring that experience gained on the ground is feeding effectively back into the intergovernmental processes. This feedback loop is visible in the reports which I am introducing today, where we have built on our own experience and expertise, and on the inputs from Member States and the UN system.

Two of the reports, namely on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (in document A/66/181), and on violence against women migrant workers (in document A/66/212), confirm that specific and targeted policy responses must be crafted to empower these groups of women, and to prevent and eliminate discrimination against them.

As the report on the situation of women in rural areas demonstrates, rural women are critical agents in poverty reduction, food security, and environmental sustainability. Their full contribution is critical to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. This notwithstanding, rural women continue to be economically and socially disadvantaged for many reasons: their limited access to economic resources and opportunities, their exclusion from planning and decision-making processes, and their disproportionate burden of unpaid care work.

The report makes a number of recommendations and emphasizes the need to:

- Strengthen the implementation of all existing commitments on rural development and rural women's empowerment and rights, in particular the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- Adopt gender-responsive rural development strategies and budget frameworks to ensure the incorporation of rural women's needs and priorities;
- Put in place temporary special measures to achieve the full and equal participation of rural and indigenous women in decision-making bodies at the national and local levels;
- Target rural women in national and local employment creation initiatives and build their productive capacity to enable them to participate in the global value chain;
- Develop monitoring and evaluation strategies and frameworks on gender equality and women's empowerment in rural areas to track progress and measure impacts; and
- Strengthen the capacity of national statistical offices to collect, analyze and disseminate comparable sex-disaggregated data, including time-use data and gender statistics in rural areas.

Women migrant workers are pillars for the well-being of their families and communities, yet many women who migrate for reasons including work find themselves at risk for gender-based violence, discrimination and exploitation. While Member States, sometimes with the support of the entities of the UN system and IOM, are implementing a range of policy and programme activities, much more is needed to step up prevention, protection, as well as access to remedies and support for women migrant workers in regard to discrimination and violence, and violations of rights. The new ILO Convention concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers is a key instrument for the protection of women migrant workers.

The report makes a number of recommendations that aim at prevention, protection, as well as access to remedies and support for women migrant workers in regard to discrimination and violence, and violations of rights. It emphasizes the need to:

- Ratify and implement international instruments, and in particular the Convention concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers, which was adopted by the General Conference of the International Labour Organization in June 2011; and conclude and implement bilateral and multilateral arrangements to protect the rights of women migrant workers;
- Enhance data collection, research, analysis and dissemination on violence and violation of migrant women's rights and on migrant women workers' contribution to development;
- Strengthen national legislation and ensure coherence among policies that have a bearing on the situation of women migrant workers;
- Expand prevention and support measures.

I would like to highlight two aspects that emanate clearly from both reports. While Member States and United Nations entities have been active in putting in place measures to empower rural women and women migrant workers, we have identified a dearth of knowledge on the impact of such initiatives. All actors need to pay much closer attention to the effectiveness of measures taken and of results achieved – and to reverse course, if needed. A second point is that the approach taken is both general, and ad hoc, lacking the targeted and systematic nature that is needed to make a dramatic difference in the situation of these groups of women.

The fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2012 will be an opportunity to take an in-depth look, and to move the issue of rural women forward in a comprehensive manner.

The need for a more systematic attention to gender perspectives is also made in the third report before you, on measures taken and progress achieved in follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (in document A/66/211). We have analyzed a large number of reports, and resolutions adopted by intergovernmental processes. We concluded that attention to gender equality and the empowerment of women continues to be most strongly evidenced in those processes that deal with social

and economic issues. Inequalities between women and men, however, permeate all sectors and subject matters, and should therefore be a visible part of analysis and action everywhere.

The report's recommendations highlight the need to:

- Fully mainstream a gender perspective into all issues considered by intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations and into all United Nations summits and conferences;
- Ensure that reports of the Secretary-General to intergovernmental bodies systematically include a gender perspective through gender analysis and sex- and age-disaggregated quantitative data;
- Improve the collection, analysis and dissemination of data disaggregated by sex and age;
- Emphasize the important role and contribution of civil society in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly; and
- Encourage and support the participation of women's groups and non-governmental organizations specialized in gender equality issues in intergovernmental processes.

Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

These remain difficult and uncertain economic and financial times. One year after its establishment, UN-Women is seriously under-resourced, hampering our ability to deliver on the expectations of stakeholders. We are working to expand our resource base, including by reaching out to non-traditional funding sources. I extend our sincere appreciation to those Member States that have provided voluntary contributions. We look forward to your support so that we can indeed deliver prompt, concrete results.

Thank you very much.