

**United Nations  
Division for the Advancement of Women  
Expert Group Meeting  
Enhancing Participation of Women in Development  
through an Enabling Environment for Achieving Gender Equality and the  
Advancement of Women  
Bangkok, Thailand, 8-11 November 2005**

**Message from  
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United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

**Opening session, 8 November 2005**

Delivered by  
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Distinguished experts and participants,

It gives me great pleasure to send a message to the opening session of this expert group meeting on “Enhancing Women’s Participation in Development through an Enabling Environment for Achieving Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women”. I had planned to be present, but am unable to attend, due to pressures of work.

I would like to begin by expressing deep appreciation to our colleagues from the Emerging Social Issues Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for the excellent collaboration in organizing this meeting. I gratefully acknowledge the support provided by the Division’s Director, Ms. Thelma Kay, Chief of Section, Ms. Tone Bleie, and Ms. Koh Miyaoi, Social Affairs Officer.

I welcome and thank the experts for accepting the invitation of the Secretary-General. I also warmly welcome all other participants - observers and colleagues from the United Nations system, from foundations, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations.

The Division for the Advancement of Women traditionally holds expert group meetings prior to each session of the Commission on the Status of Women as a means of ensuring access to the latest research and practical experience on the themes before the Commission. One of the two themes to be discussed by the Commission next year is “Enhanced participation of women in development: An enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia,

the fields of education, health and work". The Commission will negotiate and adopt Agreed Conclusions on this topic.

To facilitate an effective input to the work of the Commission, an interactive panel on the same topic will be held at the 50<sup>th</sup> session in March 2006. The results of this expert group meeting, and the main recommendations of the report you will adopt during the closing session on Friday, will be presented during the panel. This meeting thus provides an important opportunity to provide a critical input to the Commission's outcome.

The ten-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was carried out during the 49<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women earlier this year. The review and appraisal showed that there has been significant progress over the past decade in terms of policy reforms, legislative change, and institutional development, including increased attention to resource allocations through gender-sensitive budgeting. Adherence to international and regional instruments for the protection of the human rights of women was enhanced. There was also greater recognition of the critical importance of partnerships for achieving gender equality, including the role played by NGOs; and efforts to engage men and boys more actively.

Analysis of the responses from Governments clearly indicated, however, that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains far from being fully achieved. Progress has been uneven within and across regions. While some gains had been seen in relation to each of the 12 Critical Areas of Concern in all regions, serious obstacles and challenges were also reported in every area. A large gap remains between policy and practice, and the enabling environment for women's participation in development emphasized in the Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly has not yet been fully achieved. Discriminatory practices and public attitudes have not changed at the same pace as policy, legal and institutional frameworks; and we are still far from fully mainstreaming gender perspectives in policies and programmes in all policy areas.

The Declaration adopted by the Commission during the review and appraisal reaffirmed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. While welcoming progress made, Member States recognized the remaining challenges and obstacles and pledged further action for full and accelerated implementation. The Declaration called upon the United Nations system, international and regional organizations, all sectors of civil society including non-governmental organizations, as well as all women and men, to fully commit themselves and to intensify their contributions to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

The outcome of the 2005 World Summit, held in New York last month, also reaffirmed that gender equality is essential to development, security, peace and that the full and effective implementation of the goals and objectives of the Platform for Action is required for achievement of the internationally agreed development goals. Member States

endorsed the importance of gender mainstreaming for achieving gender equality and undertook to actively promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres.

The commitments and roadmaps for gender equality and women's empowerment are clearly laid out. The challenge before us is ensuring accelerated implementation. This expert group meeting comes at a timely moment since one essential element in accelerating implementation is identifying constraints and challenges in establishing an enabling environment, and outlining strategies to address these on a priority basis.

The Declaration from the Commission on the Status of Women and the outcome of the 2005 World Summit provides critical guidance on enhancing the enabling environment. Importantly, the Declaration recognized that the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are mutually reinforcing in achieving gender equality and empowerment of women. In the Summit outcome, Member States emphasized the importance of the Millennium Development Goals, as a subset of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, around which it has been possible to galvanize considerable commitment, resources and partnerships. Ensuring full implementation of CEDAW and the MDGs, and the gender mainstreaming strategy, should be seen as essential elements in an enabling environment.

Very importantly, the outcome of the World Summit emphasizes the interlinkages and interdependence between development, peace and security and human rights. Human rights, human security and effective and accountable governance, highlighted in the World Summit, should be key elements in an enabling environment for gender equality and empowerment of women.

This expert group meeting provides a timely opportunity for reflecting upon the main challenges to enhancing women's participation in development, for analyzing the factors leading to the creation of an enabling environment, and for developing policy recommendations for the adoption of specific strategies by different stakeholders at different levels. Your discussions will focus on identifying the critical elements in an enabling environment and the achievements, gaps and challenges in putting these in place, using examples from health, education and work. You could be guided in this work by the framework proposed by the Millennium Project Taskforce 3 which focused on increasing women's capabilities, assets and agency. As well as focusing on national level, you will investigate the extent to which favourable changes at national level – for example in laws, policies, infrastructure, institutions and services - have led to changes on the ground at community and household levels, as well as the ways in which mobilization from below can be a dynamic force for change. It will be important to identify lessons learned and good practices on what facilitates or hinders the development of an enabling environment.

This expert group meeting brings together persons who have been actively involved in this field for years. I am fully confident that your knowledge and experience, from national, regional and global contexts, will provide important insights. I hope that your final report will comprehensively analyze the issues at hand and make practical recommendations for strategies to create an enabling environment for women's enhanced participation in development. It will be a challenging task, but I am sure that the expertise gathered here will guarantee the success of the expert group meeting. I wish you productive discussions and an excellent outcome.

Thank you.