

**Statement by Carolyn Hanman, Director,  
Division for the Advancement of Women  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

**The achievements of the Commission on the Status of Women**

**2006 NGO consultation  
Plenary 1: 50 years of CSW  
26 February 2006**

Madame Moderator  
Participants, colleagues and friends

It is always a pleasure to collaborate with non-governmental organizations in the work of the United Nations. There is a particularly positive tradition of cooperation around the Commission on the Status of Women. I am delighted that once again large numbers of women have registered for participation in the Commission, especially at this important 50<sup>th</sup> session.

I would like to begin by expressing our appreciation for the two very successful joint panels organized by the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in collaboration with the Division for the Advancement of Women on the substantive themes of the Commission, as well as for all other collaboration in preparation for this session of the Commission.

It is a great honour to make a presentation on the achievements of the Commission on the Status of women (CSW) which is commemorating both its 60th anniversary and its 50<sup>th</sup> session this year. I have always been a great supporter of the work of the Commission. During my professional career, I have had the privilege to work with the Commission in a number of contexts – as a delegate, as an NGO representative and most recently as responsible for its Secretariat. I have also found inspiration and guidance in the work of the Commission in other phases of my work-life, as a development cooperation bureaucrat and a university researcher and lecturer.

The Charter of the United Nations established at the founding of the United Nations in June 1945 endorsed equality between women and men as a fundamental human right. Its Preamble declared faith “in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small...” This was largely the result of intensive lobbying by women delegates and representatives of the 42 non-governmental organizations accredited to the founding conference.

A Subcommission on the Status of Women was established in 1946 to lead the work of the United Nations in promoting the advancement of women, under the Commission on Human Rights. The first Chairperson of the Sub-Commission was Bodil

Begtrup (Denmark). Women delegates and representatives of non-governmental organizations called for a separate body specifically dedicated to women's issues and four months later the Sub-Commission was upgraded to a fully-fledged Commission - the Commission on the Status of Women.

The Commission was established with two basic functions - to "...prepare recommendations and reports to the Economic and Social Council on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields", and to make recommendations on "...urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights." Following the Nairobi conference in 1985, the mandate of the Commission was expanded to provide policy input to the work of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. In 1987, its mandate was further expanded to review progress in implementation of the outcomes of the World Conferences on women.

The Commission met for the first time at Lake Success, New York, in February 1947. Initially, the Commission focused on legal measures to protect the human rights of women and developing awareness of the status and situation of women around the world. Debates in the Commission brought unfamiliar issues into the international political arena. From the very beginning, the work of the Commission attracted the interest, participation and support of the growing international women's movement.

By the mid 1960s, the Commission had began to recognize and address women's role in economic and social development. Delegates from developing countries drew attention in particular to the situation of women in rural areas and the need to enhance their contributions and address their priorities and needs. The Commission played a major role in transforming the understanding of the role of women in development.

In 1975, at the urging of the Commission and NGOs, the UN observed International Women's Year with the theme "Equality, Development and Peace". The culmination of the year was the first global Women's Conference in Mexico City which adopted a global plan of action to improve the status of women.

The United Nations Decade for Women from 1976-1985 created an unprecedented momentum for change and culminated with the establishment of the *Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000*. During the decade a new consciousness emerged on the essential contributions of women to the development process and the necessity of women's involvement for the achievement of all development goals.

At the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, Members States adopted the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* which consolidated the consensus and commitments achieved through the work of the Commission. The *Platform for Action* continues to represent the global policy framework for gender equality and empowerment of women and guides the work of Member States, the United Nations and other international and regional bodies, including organizations and networks of civil society.

A number of significant achievements resulted from the work of the Commission over the past five decades. The Commission ensured that provisions for equality between women and men were included in the *Universal Declaration for Human Rights* - a milestone in the struggle for equality. The Commission was also active in the development of other important conventions and resolutions. One example is the *Convention on the Political Rights of Women* adopted by the General Assembly in 1952. This was the first instrument of international law aimed at recognizing and protecting the political rights of women everywhere.

The Commission was established as a policy-making body - it was not given the power to investigate specific cases of discrimination nor did it have the authority to take measures to ensure compliance with standards on equality between women and men established by the United Nations. However, one of the major achievements of the Commission was the establishment of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which has developed into an effective accountability mechanism, effectively complementing the policy work of the Commission. In 1979, after four years of preparatory work by the Commission, the General Assembly adopted the landmark treaty. It entered into force in 1981 and has now been ratified by 181 countries. The Optional Protocol to the Convention was adopted by the General Assembly in 1999. The fact that 76 States now provide women access to this international remedy for human rights violations attests to the willingness of Governments to adhere to the terms of the Convention.

An important part of the work of the Commission is promoting and monitoring implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy at national level and within the United Nations system. The Commission was called upon by ECOSOC to play a catalytic role in this respect. Over the past few years, the Commission has systematically brought its outcomes – in particular its agreed conclusions on substantive topics - to the attention of relevant bodies of the United Nations. It has monitored progress in gender mainstreaming in different ways, in the United Nations system, in intergovernmental bodies, and starting at this 50<sup>th</sup> session in 2006, at national level.

Thanks to the efforts of the Commission, over the past decades, other intergovernmental bodies, such as other functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), have increasingly taken up gender equality perspectives in their work. In addressing the human rights of women, the work of the General Assembly - in particular in the context of an on-going in-depth study on all forms of violence against women - makes an essential contribution to identifying the major gaps and challenges and proposing strategies and actions to enhance the human rights of women. A milestone in the work of the United Nations was reached with adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 in 2000, which significantly increased attention to the impact of conflict and its aftermath on women and girls, including sexual exploitation and other forms of violence. Much more, however, needs to be done to ensure that gender perspective are taken into account in all areas of the work of the United Nations and the Commission should continue to play a key role.

Over the past decade, the Commission has reviewed its working methods to increase the focus on implementation at national level and provide a forum for exchange of ideas, experiences, good practices and lessons learned. Since 1996 it has organized interactive expert panels on the themes under consideration. In 2003 it decided to hold high-level round tables for high level representatives attending the annual sessions, such as Ministers, State Secretaries and heads of national mechanisms for gender equality and empowerment of Women. These round tables have focused on institutional capacity-building, statistics, national mechanisms for the advancement of women and incorporating gender perspectives into national development strategies.

As well as providing a unique forum for exchange of experiences and good practices in the annual meetings of gender equality experts, the Commission has also made major contributions through the organization and follow-up of the world conferences in Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995. The world conferences identified obstacles, gaps and challenges for gender equality and empowerment of women and ways to address these. They set in motion an important and continuing cycle of research and analysis; goal-setting; reviewing progress to identify achievements as well as gaps and obstacles; and renewing and expanding commitments.

The world conferences offered a forum in which women's organizations could broaden their participation and increase their voice in shaping the work of the United Nations. The number of NGOs involved in the work of the Commission grew dramatically during the Decade for Women.

Over the past ten years the Commission has systematically reviewed progress in implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern identified in the *Platform for Action* at its annual sessions, and has adopted recommendations for action to facilitate increased implementation. The Division has prepared a compilation of the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission on the critical areas of concern between 1996 and 2005. This publication will be available at the session tomorrow.

The Commission acted as the Ad-hoc Preparatory Committee for the five-year review of implementation of the *Platform for Action* in the 23<sup>rd</sup> special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century", in June 2000. The outcome identified persistent gaps and challenges and provided new recommendations for action to ensure full implementation of the commitments made in Beijing in 1995.

The ten-year review held during the 49th session of the Commission indicated that while progress had been made at national level and gains could be seen in relation to each of the 12 priority areas in all regions, serious obstacles and challenges were reported in every area. In the Declaration adopted during the ten-year review, Member States committed to ensuring full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

At the start of the new millennium, world leaders assembled at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, emphasized their commitment to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. The 2005 World Summit reiterated this resolve to eliminate discrimination against women and renewed commitment to the gender mainstreaming strategy.

The Platform for Action provides the global policy framework for gender equality and empowerment of women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provides the normative framework. The synergies between the two instruments were recognized by the Commission on the Status of Women in its 49<sup>th</sup> session and are regularly highlighted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. A major challenge for the Commission to use the two instruments effectively to ensure accountability for implementation of existing policy recommendations and human rights standards at national level.

The framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are based on the internationally agreed development goals established over the past decade, provide new opportunities for the Commission's work through mobilization of governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations around time-bound, measureable targets, and through increasing the visibility of gender issues in national development planning and reporting, facilitating the development of alliances with new partners and increasing access to resources.

It is also a significant achievement that the Commission established as early as 1975 the integral links between equality - including human rights, development and peace and has consistently worked to enhance the synergies between these three critical goals. The importance of this work was underscored by the priority given to human rights, development and security in the 2005 World Summit as the three essential pillars of the work of the United Nations. In this respect the Commission was at the forefront of global thinking.

The United Nations has played a critical role as a catalyst for gender equality and the empowerment of women, largely due to the foresight, dynamism and persistence of the Commission on the Status of Women. Over the past six decades, the Commission has provided an important political forum where much of the critical discussion has been located and important global decisions have been made.

NGO involvement with the Commission on the Status of Women, including through participation at the annual sessions and advocacy and lobbying in relation to the Member States and UN bodies, has always been very important. Your organizations and networks are critical stakeholders in gender equality and empowerment of women at national, regional and global levels. Effective partnerships between civil society, Governments and the international community are essential to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23<sup>rd</sup> special session of the General Assembly.

The high profile of the ten-year review at the 49<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission, with significant levels of participation - including over 80 Ministers - was an indication of the continuing importance attached to the implementation of the Platform for Action and of the critical role of the Commission in providing a forum to bring all stakeholders together. At this 50<sup>th</sup> session, we must both celebrate the achievements of this important global mechanism and consider ways to enhance its role in the new millennium to effectively address the challenges ahead. The development of the new multi-year programme of work provides the opportunity to do this. The Commission's role in offering an important global space for interaction and dialogue, must in the future be increasingly focused on exchange of ideas and experiences, including good practices, as well as on persistent gaps and challenges and the ways to overcome them, to ensure accelerated implementation.

I have only been able to provide a brief overview of the achievements of the Commission. The Division has prepared a short brochure on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Commission, which will be available tomorrow. I hope that you will use it during the coming year to spread information on the work of the Commission in different contexts. If you are interested in the historical perspective and want to learn more, a new publication is available on the history of UN's work on gender equality and empowerment of women. It was published by the UN Intellectual History Project and prepared by Devaki Jain.

In conclusion, throughout its history, the Commission on the Status of Women has been a strong advocate for gender equality and empowerment of women across the globe and has provided a unique space for exchange of national experience and good practice and for bringing the voice of the women's movement to the work of the United Nations. With your support, the Commission will continue to play a critical leadership role to ensure that the work of the United Nations has a positive impact on the lives of women at country level and remains a driving force for gender equality and empowerment of women.

Thank you.