

## **Enhancing Women's Global Leadership through Information Technology**

**Parallel event held from 8-9 March 2006 at the  
50<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women**

### **Closing remarks**

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Distinguished participants,

Let me first express my thanks and that of the Division for the Advancement of Women to all participants for the interest and commitment to the topic of gender equality and empowerment of women at this panel: "Enhancing women's global leadership through Information Technology".

I would like to give special thanks to all the keynote speakers and experts who participated on the panels. We are grateful for your willingness to share your experiences, lessons learned and good practices.

I also want to say a warm thanks to the co-organizers – our colleagues from the ECOSOC Support and Coordination Office, in particular the Director, Sarbuland Khan, as well as and importantly to AIT Global, in particular Mike and Carol Lackey and all colleagues and partners. The Division has been very happy to be part of this collaborative effort to increase the engagement of the private sector with the gender equality work of the United Nations, as well as to ensure systematic and effective follow-up to the commitments made in relation to women and information technology at the recent World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis.

In my closing remarks, I would like to say a few words on the Commission on the Status of Women, as I am not sure if all participants are completely aware of the broader context of this panel. The Commission on the Status of Women is the global policy-making body on gender equality and empowerment of women. It meets once a year and is attended by representatives of Member States from around the world – usually from Ministries of Women and Ministries of Foreign Affairs, but also from other ministries, depending on the topics the Commission is considering at each meeting. A large number of representatives of UN organizations and approximately 1,500 NGOs from around the world attend the annual sessions of the Commission as well.

The Commission has been in existence for 60 years and this year is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> session. It has played a major role in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, including by raising awareness of women's situation around the world, promoting women's rights, including through developing a human rights treaty specifically on women's human rights – the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms

of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), as well as organizing the four world conferences since 1975. The most recent conference in Beijing in 1995 adopted the global policy framework, the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Commission adopts new policy recommendations on specific themes each year. This year one theme was the “equal participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels” and the other was on “enhancing the participation of women through creating an enabling environment” This panel has provided important inputs on both these themes.

To commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> year and 50<sup>th</sup> session, the Division has compiled all the policy recommendations made by the Commission (in the form of “agreed conclusions”) in a booklet. This includes the policy recommendations made on the topic we have been discussing during this panel. (Copies have been made available in the back of this room and the document will also be available on the Division’s website: [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw) )

The Commission is responsible for following up the Beijing Platform for Action, and ensuring implementation at national level. It organizes interactive expert panels and high-level roundtables during its annual sessions to promote exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practices, and also dialogue on remaining gaps and challenges.

In addition, during the Commission there are a large number of parallel events organized by Member States, UN entities and NGOs, often on the themes covered by the Commission. Although these are not part of the formal programme of the Commission, they make an important contribution to the work of the Commission by expanding knowledge and facilitating sharing of experiences on critical issues. This panel has been a part of this programme of parallel events.

Let me expand a little on the role of the Commission in relation to the topic we have been discussing in this panel over the past two days, information technology. One of the critical areas of concern identified at the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 was “women and media”. Already in Beijing, the Commission identified the importance of the emerging new information and communication technologies. The Commission took up the issue of media and communication technologies again in 2003, in particular focusing on the issue of access and the potential for empowering women.

The recent World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS II) in Tunis recognized that a gender divide (or gap between women and men and girls and boys) exists as part of the digital divide in society. Member States of the United Nations reaffirmed their commitment to working to promote women's empowerment and increased equality between women and men and girls and boys to overcome this divide. There is much more work to be done in this regard, as I am sure the discussion in this panel over the past two days has made clear.

This meeting has had a strong focus on women and leadership or women in decision-making in relation to information technology, in keeping with the theme of the Commission. You have had the opportunity to consider some critical issues:

- ✓ Using ICT to improve information and exchange and decision-making;
- ✓ Women's employment in high-level positions in the private sector;
- ✓ Improving health, education and employment opportunities;
- ✓ Creating business opportunities;
- ✓ Corporate responsibility and gender equality;
- ✓ Overcoming gender stereotypes and encouraging women to pursue science and technology.

In the Division for the Advancement of Women, as I mentioned yesterday, we are working on the issue of ICT, in particular working to increase the access, use and benefits from ICT for national mechanisms for the advancement of women in Africa, such as women's ministries. These national ministries and other bodies are, in turn, committed to working to improve the access, use and benefit of ICT for women and girls in their countries.

Our work so far has indicated the complexity of gender perspectives on ICT – including issues of

- ✓ *Access* – going beyond technological aspects to looking at social roles and perceptions that hinder the equal access of women and girls:
- ✓ *Utilization* – ensuring that there is content available which is of relevance and use for women and girls; and ensuring that women are also involved in producing content (many “connected” women play a key role in repackaging relevant content and redistributing to “unconnected” women in different forms – often using innovative combinations of traditional and new technologies.
- ✓ *Enabling environments* – both in terms of increasing access, use and benefits for individual women but also in terms of ensuring attention to women's priorities and needs in national policies, regulatory frameworks, resource allocations and strategies in order to be able to reach a wider group of women and girls.
- ✓ *Impact* – ways to increase positive impacts in terms of health services, education and training, employment opportunities, income-generating opportunities, and enhancing the “voice” of women in political processes.

There are many good examples of the positive impact of information technology for women in all countries and economic contexts. For example, mobile phones have been found extremely useful for rural women, even in developing countries – by providing information on markets, prices, and opening up new alternative markets, leading to both huge time savings and financial gains. We need to learn more about innovative uses of other technologies, including internet and CD-roms, at local level.

In 2005, the Division for the Advancement of Women prepared a publication “*Women 2000 and Beyond: Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women through*

*ICT*". (Copies have been made available in the back of the room and it is also available on the Division's website: [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw) ). The publication provides an analysis of the linkages between gender equality and ICT and of the achievements and challenges in bringing attention to gender equality in ICT policies and programmes. Strategies for increasing women's access and use of technologies, strengthening their influence on infrastructure, regulations and resources, and enhancing access to benefits, including employment and income generating opportunities, are discussed in the publication.

The value of establishing new partnerships - for example with the private sector and academic institutions - to bridge the gender digital divide is highlighted. The potential role of donors in supporting innovative projects as highlighted, including for example, the production or repackaging of content particularly relevant to the interests and concerns of women; supporting women as producers of content - including at local levels; enhancing women's involvement in professional organizations related the ICT sector; and strengthening women's entrepreneurship in the ICT sector, including by identifying role models and facilitating the creation of networks and mentoring programmes.

I hope that these closing remarks have provided a little more context for this panel. We are delighted to have the opportunity to collaborate in a very constructive manner with the private sector. I hope that you will be interested in making a contribution to the new themes to be decided by the Commission from 2007. We thank you for the contributions you have made to our work through your participation. It is also my hope that this has been a positive learning process for you as well, and that you take back to your work important new insights.

Thank you.