

**Annual Awards Luncheon
National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs**

**Presentation by Carolyn Hannan
Director, Division for the Advancement of Women**

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I am honoured to participate in the 20th luncheon of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs and delighted that you are holding this event at the United Nations headquarters in New York. The National Association has a prestigious history in promoting women's rights and the empowerment of women. You have gathered a significant group of women leaders for this event. I congratulate the Awardees whose impressive backgrounds, commitments and achievements are an inspiration to us all.

I have been asked to speak on the empowerment of women in the context of the Millennium Development Goals. The imperative of achieving MDG 3 – gender equality and women's empowerment – was highlighted during the recent Secretary-General's High-level Event at the General Assembly on 25 September, in particular through a luncheon organized by the Governments of Denmark and Liberia. The High-level Event was organized to mark the mid-way point for the achievement of the MDGs. At the luncheon, and at the High-level Event itself, a number of Member States renewed commitments on gender equality and presented new and expanded initiatives.

Much more, however, needs to be done to accelerate the pace of change in achieving gender equality – which is increasingly recognized as an important goal in its own right and as critical for the achievement of all internationally agreed development goals.

I would like to focus in my presentation today on achievements in implementation of MDG3 on gender equality and empowerment of women with its specific targets on education, employment and political participation. I will also briefly discuss MDG5 on maternal health which is critical for the empowerment of women, as well as the important goal of eradicating violence against women which – while not included as a specific MDG - is integral to the achievement of MDG3 and all the MDGs.

As the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe eloquently stated at the High-level Event: *“Gender inequality is unfair, undemocratic, unintelligent, unproductive and unhealthy. The fact is that the elimination of gender based discrimination - in every area and in all spheres of life – from education to employment, and from decision-making to health – is a moral imperative and an economic necessity. A society which tolerates inequality is blocking its own social and economic progress.... If we fail in our struggle for true and effective equality, women are the immediate victims - but in the end, society as a whole suffers the consequences.”*

Despite such testimony to the importance of gender equality and empowerment of women, the facts and figures on achievement of the MDGs remain sobering. This is particularly the case for MDG 5 on improving maternal health which is the area where the least progress has been made among all the MDGs. It is unacceptable that in 2008 more than 500,000 women die annually because of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.

Education:

Progress has been made towards the elimination of gender disparities in education, with most gains in enrolment ratios at the primary level, where nearly two-thirds of countries reached gender parity by the target year of 2005. Progress is, however, not fast enough, and gains have been very uneven across regions. Of the 113 countries that missed the target at both primary and secondary levels, only 18 are likely to achieve the goal by 2015. Only 35 per cent of countries have reached parity at the secondary level and 3 per cent in tertiary education. Gender disparities in school completion rates at both primary and secondary level persist in many areas, although there are also significant regional differences.

Accelerated progress towards MDG-3 in the area of education requires making primary school free and compulsory. Measures to increase the safety of girls, reduce the risk of violence and ensure their retention in school include investments in infrastructure (providing schools near communities, separate sanitation facilities for girls, and transportation to and from schools.) Community-level measures to ensure enrolment and retention include awareness-raising, provision of incentives, reducing girls' domestic responsibilities, and preventing early marriage, pregnancy and violence. Measures within the educational system include gender-sensitive curricula and materials, increasing the number of women teachers, and gender sensitization for all teachers and school officials. Investment in gender equality in secondary education must be strengthened as the impacts on the empowerment of women and girls are highest at this level

Employment:

Increasing educational attainment can only be effective as an empowerment strategy if it translates into equality of economic opportunities. Women's economic empowerment remains precarious in many parts of the world. Fewer women than men have secure paid jobs in the formal economy. Women account for almost 40 per cent of all paid employment outside agriculture, which is up from 36 per cent in 1990. Wide regional differences, however, remain, with particular constraints in rural areas, and women are more likely than men to be unpaid family workers or own-account workers with less or no security or benefits. Women's unemployment rate stands at 6.4 per cent compared to the male rate of 5.7 per cent in 2007.

Women's paid work in many areas is, however, characterized by occupational segregation and women are often concentrated in low-paid jobs with little security. Gender wage gaps persist throughout the world. Women's unequal share of unpaid

household work often restricts their access to full employment and steers them into the informal economy, particularly in the context of HIV/AIDS and the food crisis.

Empowering women in the labour market requires the ratification and enforcement of the ILO Conventions, and implementation of decent work principles, such as social protection and freedom from harassment. Effective measures on child-care and parental leave can do much to expand women's employment opportunities. Measures to address the working conditions and remuneration of women in the informal sector need to be developed. Support must also be provided for women's self-employment and entrepreneurship, especially in rural areas, including through improved access to land/property, credit, training and markets.

In rural areas, women's significant contribution to ensuring food security is often not recognized or compensated. Poor women are especially affected by the current increases in food prices, and all efforts to improve agricultural productivity and stimulate rural development must give targeted attention to women farmers. For the first time, on this coming Wednesday 15 October, the first International Day of Rural Women will be observed by the United Nations. This provides an important opportunity to recognize the role and contribution of rural women in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty, as well as their role as agents of change in combating climate change.

Political participation:

Progress in increasing women's political representation in national parliaments has been steady but slow, and uneven across regions. Between 2000 and 2008, the proportion of women's seats in parliaments only increased from an average of 13.5 per cent to 17.9 per cent. Only 20 countries have achieved over 30 per cent female representation in parliament. In this context, we should particularly recognize Rwanda, where recent elections have resulted in, for the first time ever in history, over 50 per cent women in parliament.

Obstacles to women's representation have included the unequal sharing of unpaid work which limits their time, lack of resources, limited opportunities for capacity-building, and in some cases threats or the use of violence as a deterrent. While representation is an important indicator of women's capacity to influence decision-making, including on public policies, strategies and resource allocations, women's access to leadership positions is also critical. Progress in this area has been very slow. The number of women serving in leadership positions, for example as presiding officers in parliament, has only increased from 10 per cent in 1995 to 10.7 per cent in 2008. Efforts must be made to increase the participation of women at all levels of government and in other decision-making fora, such as in the judiciary, academia, the private sector, civil society and the media.

Experience shows that women are elected to political bodies in greater numbers in proportional representation electoral systems that include electoral quotas. Other

supportive mechanisms include transparent selection processes within political parties, support from senior political leaders, access to public funding, training for women candidates and elected officials, awareness-raising for the public at large to change social attitudes, and protection from violence. The strength of civil society is critical in mobilizing support for women candidates and elected officials.

Maternal mortality:

Access to reproductive health care is critical for the achievement of all the targets under MDG3 and for women's overall empowerment. Almost all of the more than 500,000 deaths during pregnancy or childbirth reported in 2005 were in developing countries, and 86 percent were in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Improved antenatal care and availability of skilled assistance during delivery are critical to maternal health. More than 40 per cent of births in developing countries are not attended by a doctor, midwife or nurse. The proportion of pregnant women in the developing world who had at least one antenatal care visit increased from slightly more than half at the beginning of the 1990s to almost three fourths a decade later. While this is an improvement, the World Health Organization and UNICEF recommend a minimum of four antenatal care visits. In Africa, only 42 per cent of women met the WHO/UNICEF requirement. Many women die because there is no access to emergency obstetrics, including because of limited access to transport.

Giving birth at an early age increases the mother's risk of dying during pregnancy or in childbirth, and the child's risk of dying in infancy or childhood. Early motherhood also reduces the mother's access to education and other opportunities. Despite clear incentives to reduce adolescent fertility, the needs and demands of adolescent for contraceptives are met to a lesser extent than those of older women. Greater efforts need to be made to reduce adolescent fertility and reduce early childbirth.

The unmet need for family planning - the gap between women's stated desires to delay or avoid having children and their actual use of contraception - has declined in most countries where it is possible to see discernable trends. However, it is estimated that there are more than 200 million women who want to delay or avoid a birth who are not using modern contraceptive methods. In all regions this unmet need is highest among the poorest households. In Sub-Saharan Africa, nearly one in four married women has an unmet need for family planning. This contributes to the high fertility in the region and has undermined achievement of other MDGs, such as reducing child mortality, hunger and malnutrition, and increasing primary education enrollment.

Violence against women:

As mentioned earlier, violence against women is critical for the achievement of all MDGs. Atrocious acts of violence against women, which are serious violations of women's human rights, are a daily occurrence in all parts of the world, in times of both peace and conflict. Such violence remains a significant impediment to progress towards

the Millennium Development Goals, with serious costs for victims as well as their families and communities.

Trafficking in women remains an under-documented form of violence against women. While reliable data are lacking, estimates of its scope and its illicit profits attest to the gravity of this massive violation of human rights, and the severe consequences of this crime for the victims are well known.

The links between violence against women and MDG3 and all MDGS should be clear. Violence and the threat of such violence constrain women and girls from availing themselves of educational and employment opportunities and hinder them from participating effectively in public affairs.

2008 has seen some remarkable steps in the work on combating violence against women. The Secretary-General is spearheading global efforts and working to ensure high visibility and sustained attention to the issue through his campaign: “Unite to end all forms of violence against women and girls.” The campaign calls for increased global advocacy; strengthened partnerships at regional and national levels; and enhanced leadership roles for the United Nations. Member States, UN entities and civil society organizations are encouraged to contribute actively to this campaign so that we can make tangible progress.

Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) of June 2008 marked a significant milestone in defining sexual violence in conflict as a security issue, and recognizing that effective steps to prevent and respond to sexual violence can significantly contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Increased efforts are, however, needed to strengthen the fight against impunity and to base efforts on a comprehensive and holistic approach that includes effective laws and policies, improved data, services for victims, prevention efforts, measures to build capacities, raise awareness and change attitudes, and efforts to secure greater involvement by men.

Moving forward:

Achieving gender equality and empowerment of women depends not only on the extent to which the specific targets under MDG3 are met, but also on the extent to which the actions taken to achieve all the other MDGs are designed to promote the equality of women and men. Gender equality advocates need to give significant attention to ensuring that plans, programmes and resource allocations for all other MDGs take gender equality perspectives into consideration.

Moving forward requires greater attention to the human rights of women. The MDGs have to be addressed in a right-based approach. Women all around the world continue to be subject to discrimination and violations of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in gender-specific ways. Laws continue to discriminate against

women, denying them equal access with men to productive resources, including land, property and inheritance rights. Even where openly discriminatory laws have been revised or abolished, their enforcement may be slow. Discriminatory practices, attitudes and stereotypes may persist, creating obstacles to women's enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Significant progress on scaling up and accelerating progress on MDG3 and incorporating gender equality aspects in the implementation of other MDGs in any meaningful way will require considerably increased financial commitments, through domestic resource allocation as well as through funding from bilateral and multilateral sources and non-traditional funding mechanisms. Methodologies and tools for assessing both the need for resources, as well as the allocations and expenditures, have to be much improved.

Although the MDG-3 indicators provide important measures of gender equality and empowerment of women, there is need for additional, more comprehensive indicators to cover the additional priority areas identified by Heads of State at the World Summit. New indicators on women's share of productive, full and decent employment and reproductive health have been incorporated into the MDG framework and are reported on for the first time in 2008. Some countries have customized the MDG3 indicators to add country-specific ones which target particular gender equality issues. For any work on indicators to be successful, however, improvements need to be made in official statistics at both the national and international levels to produce accurate data regularly with sufficient country coverage for meaningful global comparisons. Lack of reliable, comparable data is a significant constraint to measuring progress in all areas of work on gender equality.

The challenges before us remain great but we already know many of the strategies we need to adopt to move forward. What has to be significantly increased are political commitment to action and investment of resources and accountability for achieving results.

Non-governmental organizations, such as the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs, have been critical partners of the United Nations since its foundation. Thanks to dynamic approaches and consistent advocacy and activism, the women's movement has kept the United Nations focused on the critical issue of gender equality and empowerment of women. I encourage your organization to continue its important work and encourage you in particular to find ways to be actively involved in the efforts of the Secretary-General to increase efforts to eradicate violence against women, in particular through the Campaign: Unite to end violence against women.

I again congratulate all the Awardees for their inspirational work on women's empowerment and wish them continued success in their efforts.

Thank you.