

First Biennial Seneca Falls Dialogues
On the occasion of the 160th anniversary of the Seneca Falls Declaration
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Keynote Presentation on the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights
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It is a great honour for me to speak at today's commemoration of 160 years of work on the human rights of women in the United States. This event marks not only the Seneca Falls Convention of July 1848, but also celebrates the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948.

I want to thank the Mayor of Seneca Falls, Diana Smith, for her inspiring words at the opening of the conference. I also express my appreciation to the organizers of the Seneca Falls Dialogue, the Co-Chairwomen - Joan Bozer, Adriene Emmo and Marilyn Tedeschi - as well as all other Committee Members and Volunteers, for the opportunity to participate.

It is inspirational to be here in Seneca Falls – a place steeped in history of critical importance for the promotion of gender equality and the equal rights of women and men. We all pay tribute to the driving forces behind the Seneca Falls Convention, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. Called to discuss “the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman”, the Convention marked the beginning of the movement in the United States to claim women's rights. It was an important achievement in 1848 and its meaning and significance has not diminished with time. It is especially positive to be able to commemorate this milestone in the history of the promotion of gender equality in this country at the same time as we commemorate another critical international watershed on human rights – the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights where Eleanor Roosevelt, a dynamic woman leader, played a critical role. Earlier speakers at this conference have already given testimony to the important role Eleanor Roosevelt played in the promotion of gender equality in this country.

The addition of the two words “*and women*” in the Declaration of Sentiments in 1848 was a revolution at the time. In affirming that “all men *and women* have been created equal”, the Convention was the starting point of the long struggle for women's right to vote in the United States, which finally resulted in success with the adoption by the US Congress of a constitutional amendment on women's suffrage by a narrow margin in 1919. The amendment entered into force in August 1920.

In my remarks, I will focus on the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the role women – including but not limited to Eleanor Roosevelt - played in the drafting and adoption and the place these documents accord to the rights of women. I will discuss the path to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and close with some observations on the status of women's human rights around the world today.

The Charter of the United Nations and women's human rights

I begin by discussing the formulation of the United Nations Charter as this provides an important background to the work on the Human Rights Commission and the work on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since its founding in 1945, equality of women with men has been on the agenda of the United Nations: the Charter of the United Nations is the first international agreement that proclaims the equal rights of women and men.

It is important to recall that at the time of the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945, women had equal voting rights with men in only 30 of the 51 States represented at the United Nations Conference on International Organizations, as the event was formally known. Very few women attended the conference as members of their Governments' delegations, as few women at that time held government posts. In addition to delegates, several women's non-governmental organizations were represented at the Conference. Non-governmental organizations had been active in influencing the work of the League of Nations although they did not have a recognized formal role.

While women played a critical role in ensuring inclusion of references in the Charter to the equality between women and men, these efforts were supported by a number of countries whose delegations were headed by men. And it is interesting to note that the women present did not constitute a cohesive and united lobby in support of these references. Some clearly took strong feminist positions while others believed that the time of the – as one woman delegate called it - 'old militant feminism' had passed and they preferred to work from within rather than battering on doors from without.

Latin American women had a pioneering role in the global women's movement, and thanks to their pressure and demands, the Inter-American Commission of Women (IACW or CIM) had been established already in 1928 by the International Conference of American States. This was the first specialized intergovernmental body to address issues related to the status of women. It is not surprising, therefore, that Latin American women were the most active in ensuring that women's rights were reflected in the United Nations Charter. Headed by Bertha Lutz from Brazil, the group included Minerva Bernardino from the Dominican Republic and delegates from Uruguay, Mexico and Venezuela. Wu Yi-fang from China was another prominent feminist at the San Francisco conference. Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and Norway also had women delegates or advisers. Virginia Gildersleeve, of the American delegation, Professor of English and Dean of Barnard Women's College, was supportive of some of the demands, but made it clear that she did not see herself as a 'feminist'.

In the end, several crucial elements for gender equality made it into the Charter: The Preamble reaffirms the faith of the peoples of the United Nations "... in the equal rights of men and women". Article 1 sets out, as one of the purposes of the United Nations, the promotion and encouragement of the respect for human rights and

fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to “race, sex, language, or religion”. The Charter also establishes women’s right to equal participation in the Organization in Article 8, where it states that “the United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs”. Some of the women advocated for the establishment of a women’s commission in the Charter, but this idea was not retained at that stage.

As a result of this lobbying and discussion in the development of the Charter, women’s rights were a prominent item on the agenda when the United Nations held its inaugural meeting in London in February 1946. Eleanor Roosevelt attended as a delegate. She read “An Open Letter to the Women of the World” from the 17 women attending the session, expressing the hope that women’s involvement in the United Nations would grow, and calling on Governments to encourage women to be active in national and international affairs and in building peace. This letter was the first formal articulation of women’s voices in the United Nations.

Women’s rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Following the Second World War, human rights were placed high on the international agenda. As directed by the Charter in Article 68, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) proceeded at its first session to establish the Commission on Human Rights, with a mandate that included the elaboration of an international bill of rights. The Commission started work in January 1947, with Eleanor Roosevelt as its first very able Chairperson.

By that time, the Commission on the Status of Women - which had initially been established as a sub-Commission under the Human Rights Commission - had been elevated to a self-standing inter-governmental body that reported directly to the ECOSOC. It was chaired by Ms Bodil Begtrup, of Denmark, who had earlier argued convincingly for the establishment of a separate, independent Commission for women on the same level with the Commission on Human Rights, suggesting that women did not want to be dependent “on the pace of another commission”. The assumption was that there would be so many other critical human rights issues that the status of women would be pushed to the background.

Initially, the Commission on Human Rights did not actively seek to stay in touch with the Commission on the Status of Women, and the two commissions threatened to drift apart. After prodding by Ms Begtrup, ECOSOC passed a resolution which asked the Commission on Human Rights “to invite the officers of the Commission on the Status of Women to be present and participate without voting ... when the rights of women were being considered”. This was a critical decision since members of the Commission on the Status of Women played a critical role in ensuring gender equality was included in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

The Commission on the Status of Women provided critical drafting inputs to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Ms Begtrup was an effective and persuasive spokesperson. As one author has observed “it seems that the absence of sexism in the Universal Declaration is primarily due to the aggressive lobbying of Ms Begtrup and the steady pressure of the Soviet delegation”. And, as the then director of the UN Division of Human Rights (who also oversaw at the time the branch that serviced the CSW) noted, “more perhaps than any other United Nations body, the delegates to the CSW were personally committed to its objectives ... and acted as a kind of lobby for the women of the world ... There was no more independent body in the UN. Many governments had appointed ... as their representatives women who were militants in their own countries.”

As had been the case with the Charter, a number of delegations headed by men helped shape the content and language of the Universal Declaration to explicitly set forth the equality of women, and to eliminate male-centred formulations. Words such as ‘men’ as synonym for humanity, and phrases such as ‘all men are brothers’ were not retained, thanks to the combined efforts of the Commission on the Status of Women and these delegates. Study of the history of the development of the Declaration reveals the importance of language and terminology. There was a struggle to achieve gender-sensitivity in the document, made all the more difficult by the fact that there was no unified position among the women involved in the process. Some women supported the use of the term “man” to refer to humankind; while others opposed this terminology very strongly.

The use of the phrases ‘everyone’ and ‘no one’ in the text strengthens the Declaration and confirms that many of the drafters intended it to be an inclusive document. It must, however, also be noted that a number of articles use the male pronoun, rather than both: for example, while Article 15 establishes in para 1 that “everyone has the right to a nationality”, it determines in para 2 that “no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of *his* nationality nor denied the right to change *his* nationality.” This pattern prevails in other articles as well.

The Declaration’s preamble reiterates the Charter’s preamble on the reaffirmation of the equal rights of men and women. Article 1, which retained almost verbatim the Commission’s proposal, reads: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” It does, however, also state that they should “act towards one another in a *spirit of brotherhood*”. Article 2, which sets out the fundamental right equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms without distinction, includes sex as one of the prohibited grounds of distinction, reiterates the other three contained in the Charter, and broadens it by adding several other grounds, such as colour, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The fundamental right of equality and non-discrimination was thus established as a corner stone of the international human rights framework. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights which was adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948 by a vote of 48 in favour, with none against and 8 abstentions, ‘as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations’. It was hailed as a

triumph uniting very diverse, even conflicting political regimes, philosophical and religious systems and cultural traditions, and Eleanor Roosevelt's dynamic leadership for arriving at this result was critical. The Declaration's fundamental principles – that human rights are based on the 'inherent dignity' of every human person, with inalienable rights and freedoms, belonging equally to every person 'without distinction of any kind' – inspired and guided the subsequent standard setting effort of the United Nations.

This was a significant achievement for gender equality and women's human rights which provided the cornerstone for all subsequent work by the United Nations and its Member States.

The promotion and protection of the rights of women

Over the past six decades, the United Nations has played a significant role in the promotion and protection of women's human rights. There has been a progressive elaboration of the substantive content of women's human rights and of the creation of mechanisms and processes to support implementation and to monitor the enjoyment by women of their rights. The United Nations has had the lead role in putting in place the global normative standards for equality between women and men, and for the elimination of discrimination against women.

To that end, a dual strategy is pursued. On the one hand, there are specialized norms, standards, as well as mechanisms and policies that specifically support the promotion of women's equality and the elimination of discrimination against women. At the same time, all sectors and mechanisms, including those dealing with human rights generally, are called upon to contribute actively to the practical realization of the principle of the equality of women and men, through the gender mainstreaming strategy. This strategy reinforces an understanding that gender equality must be addressed as a strategic objective by society as a whole, rather categorized as "women's concerns". It also recognizes that women's unequal status is based on and perpetuated by structures of systemic inequality and discrimination.

The Commission on the Status of Women took the lead role in drawing up norms concerning women's rights – the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, adopted by the General Assembly in December 1952; the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, of January 1957; and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages of November 1962 and its Recommendation of 1965. The Commission was also the author of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1967, and most importantly, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women constitutes the pinnacle of the United Nations' standard-setting work on gender equality. This landmark treaty moves beyond guarantees of equality in the earlier instruments, as well as general human rights treaties, such as the two Covenants on Civil

and Political Rights, and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Convention sets out, in legally binding form, a comprehensive legal framework for women's equality, and establishes a focused, women-specific human rights regime. Adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 1979, the Convention now has 185 States parties which are obligated to translate its provisions into practice. Currently, there are eight Member States of the United Nations which have not yet ratified the Convention. [Member States that are not party to the Convention: Iran (Islamic Republic of), Nauru, Palau, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan, Tonga, United States of America. The Holy See is not a State party.]

The Convention provides for women's equal enjoyment with men of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and requires States parties to eliminate discrimination against women not only in the public sphere, but also in the private sphere including within the family. It requires from States the practical realization of the principle of equality of women and men and requires States parties to pursue, 'by all appropriate means', and 'without delay', a policy of eliminating discrimination against women. Adherence to the Convention fosters a climate – both internationally and nationally - where violations of the rights of women will not be tolerated.

Implementation of the Convention is monitored by a Committee of 23 experts, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which reviews reports that all States parties are obliged to present on a regular basis in a constructive dialogue. In its concluding observations, the Committee provides country-specific guidance on further steps required by States parties concerned to accelerate compliance with the Convention's provisions. The Committee thereby holds States accountable for their compliance with their international legal obligations for the promotion and protection of the rights of women. By way of example, in the biennium 2006-2007, the Committee examined the status of Convention implementation in 69 States parties. In very many instances, the Committee benefited from the information provided by non-governmental women's organizations in those States who brought to the Committee's attention their priority concerns.

In addition to this general monitoring mechanism, the Optional Protocol to the Convention, adopted by the General Assembly in 1999, now provides an opportunity for individual women, or groups of women, to seek redress for alleged violations of their rights under the Convention, once certain admissibility criteria are fulfilled. The Optional Protocol also gives the Committee authority to initiate inquiries into grave or systematic violations of the rights enshrined in the Convention. These procedures offer an international recourse for women who have been denied justice at the national level. Most importantly, it provides an additional impetus for States to ensure that adequate and accessible domestic remedies for violations of the rights of women are in place.

Although the Protocol only came into force in 2000, the Committee already has highlighted the need for more effective national remedies for women and called for the repeal of discriminatory laws, policies and practices. The Committee has found violations of women's rights under the Convention in complaints involving domestic violence and forced sterilization. It carried out its first inquiry into the abduction, rape

and murder of women in and around Ciudad Juárez in Mexico, which included a visit to the State party in the autumn of 2003. The Committee gave detailed recommendations to the State party for eliminating discrimination and bringing to an end the violations of the rights of women.

Complementing the standards and obligations under the Convention and the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women, other human rights instruments and mechanisms also support the elimination of discrimination and the realization of the principle of equality of women and men. For example, the Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights obligate States parties to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of the rights enshrined in these instruments, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides for equality before the law and equal protection of the law without discrimination, including on grounds of sex. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is particularly pertinent to the situation of girls. The monitoring bodies under those treaties regularly address the rights of women and girls within the mandates provided by those treaties, including discrimination against women in the areas of employment, education, health, housing, trafficking, or political life. They have also examined gender-related forms of racial discrimination.

The work of the United Nations in the realm of standard-setting continues to this day, as part of the global community's continuously evolving commitment to the rights of persons, or groups of persons whose inherent rights and dignity have long remained marginalized or unrecognized. This deepening of human rights work has resulted in conventions to protect the rights of migrant workers and members of their families and of persons with disabilities, as well as a Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, to give a few examples. Increasingly, these texts have become more attuned in their language to current standards of equality between women and men – that is, their language has become increasingly gender-sensitive.

The 1984 Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first major human rights treaty that consistently used both the male and female pronouns. The Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities constitutes a further significant development, in that it sets out as one of the Convention's principles the equality between men and women (art 3). It devotes a specific article to women and girls with disabilities (article 6), where States parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination and commit to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Convention also refers to gender-specific needs and concerns in several other articles, for example article 16 on freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse.

Several of the world conferences held by the United Nations in the 1990s were instrumental in enhancing the visibility and prominence of women's human rights on the international agenda. These conferences added important political commitments and policy recommendations for action that complement the international legal framework on the human rights of women. In particular, the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights

in Vienna highlighted the promotion of all human rights instruments relating to women, and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing called for action to address the systematic and systemic nature of discrimination against women in order to achieve the full realization of human rights for all. The Beijing Platform for Action identified human rights as one of the 12 critical areas of concern, and set strategic objectives and detailed action for achieving these rights for women and girls. Both conferences confirmed that the human rights of women and girls are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights and emphasized that the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls is a priority for Governments and the United Nations.

In the Millennium Declaration of 2000, Heads of State and Government resolved to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Commitments to gender equality and the promotion of the human rights of women were also included in the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

The United Nations Security Council set a milestone in 2000 when it held its first-ever discussion on women and peace and security. In the resulting resolution 1325 (2000), the Council called for special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence in armed conflict, and to put an end to the impunity of perpetrators. Last June, it reinforced this path-breaking step when it addressed sexual violence as an issue of international peace and security (resolution 1820 (2008)).

Judicial bodies have also contributed to greater awareness about and visibility of atrocities committed against women. The ad hoc tribunals created to address crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone have recognized sexual violence, including rape, as acts of torture, as crimes against humanity, and an element of genocide in some circumstances, and have enhanced the role of the international criminal justice system in providing accountability for violence against women in armed conflict.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which entered into force in July 2002, is significant in a number of ways. It established jurisdiction for the Court to try crimes of sexual violence, such as rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution and forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization and other sexual violence as crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed at a civilian population. The Statute calls for a fair representation of female and male judges and the inclusion of judges with legal expertise on specific issues, including violence against women and children. It also makes provision for the application of gender-sensitive justice, including victim and witness protection measures.

Together, these legal and policy instruments constitute a comprehensive agenda for action for the promotion and protection of the rights of women. They have also enabled a continuous deepening of our understanding of the substantive content of the

rights of women. As a result, many women's concerns are now explicitly addressed as human rights concerns, including violence against women and trafficking in women.

Progress in women's enjoyment of their human rights

In 2004, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women issued a statement to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, where it noted significant progress in the recognition and implementation of the human rights of women since the Convention's adoption. Many countries have strengthened the legal framework for equality, ensuring that *de jure* equality for women is now better established. Constitutions in many countries include provisions guaranteeing equality on grounds of sex. Legislation prohibiting discrimination in general, and in regard to specific areas such as employment, has become a standard component of regulatory frameworks. Many countries have repealed discriminatory provisions in civil, penal and personal status codes to bring them into conformity with the Convention. Equal opportunity acts aim at improving women's legal and de facto position. New laws have been adopted on violence against women, especially domestic violence, to create protection and remedies for women.

Progress has also been made in putting in place institutional mechanisms that act as catalysts for the promotion and protection of the human rights of women. Civil society, and especially women's groups and organizations, have become essential actors in awareness-raising and lobbying efforts concerning the human rights of women.

Legislative advancements are supported in many countries by policies, programmes and other measures to ensure that women's *de jure* equality becomes a de facto reality. Temporary special measures are in place in many countries to accelerate achievement of de facto equality.

The way forward

We are at the mid-point for achieving the Millennium Development Goals - a set of eight goals that emanated from the Millennium Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2000 - including on poverty eradication, gender equality, education, child health, maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability and partnerships for development. While the MDG Report for 2008 revealed some progress towards achieving MDG 3 - gender equality and the empowerment of women - the facts and figures on achievements remain sobering. Girls still wait for equal primary school access in some regions and account for 55 per cent of the out-of-school population, although Member States were expected to achieve gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005. Of the 113 countries that missed the target for gender parity in enrolment at primary and secondary school levels, only 18 are likely to achieve it by 2015. Where girls' primary education enrolment lags behind boys', the gender gap widens in secondary and tertiary education.

MDG 5 on improving maternal health remains the area where the least progress has been made among all the MDGs. More than 500,000 women die annually because of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. Attendance by trained health workers during and after pregnancy and childbirth, and timely access to emergency obstetric services when life-threatening complications arise, are essential to preventing maternal mortality and disability.

Women's economic empowerment remains precarious in many parts of the world. Their significant contribution to ensuring food security is often not recognized or compensated. Fewer women than men have secure paid jobs in the formal economy, and women are more likely than men to be unpaid family workers or own-account workers with less or no security or benefits. Poor women are especially affected by the current increases in food prices. Laws continue to discriminate against women, denying them equal access with men to productive resources, including land, property and inheritance rights.

Increases in the percentage of women in parliament have been steady, but very slow and uneven across regions, and the global average is still only 18 per cent. Only 20 countries have achieved over 30 per cent female representation in parliament. In this context, I would like to recognize Rwanda, where recent elections have resulted in, for the first time in history, over 50 per cent women in parliament. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia noted in her statement to the General Assembly on 23 September that there are only a handful of women at the highest levels of leadership.

Violence against women persists in all parts of the world, in times of both peace and conflict. Only some 90 States have currently some legislative provisions that specifically address domestic violence. Marital rape is not a prosecutable offence in at least 53 States. 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. A total of 93 States have some legislative provisions regarding trafficking in human beings.

Looking back at more than sixty years of standard setting and global policy development on human rights, and on the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women through research, activism and innovation, it has to be also recognized, however, that much has been achieved over the past six decades. There have been constant, although very slow, increases in the number of women Parliamentarians; women have been elected to serve as Presidents in a number of countries; and there are women Government Ministers in all parts of the world. Women head universities and Fortune 500 companies, and start their own businesses in growing numbers. There have been significant gains in relation to health and education for women and girls in many parts of the world. These and other significant gains clearly show that the goals of equality between women and men, and women's empowerment are achievable.

Yet what we have achieved is far from enough. Remaining challenges and constraints in all areas illustrate that much more is needed to close the gap between the international standards, norms and policies and their implementation at the national level, for the benefit of all women. Eliminating stereotypes and prejudices, and modifying social and cultural patterns of conduct that discriminate against women and perpetuate inequality requires processes of deep societal change. Progress requires explicit commitment, concerted action, adequate resources and clear accountability for results. The lack of reliable, comparable data - a serious constraint to moving forward – needs to be explicitly addressed.

Conclusion

Ensuring the human rights of women and girls – the theme of this dialogue - remains a critical path to gender equality and empowerment of women. Close collaboration among Governments, women’s organizations, academia and other actors has enabled the United Nations to set a strong agenda for gender equality and empowerment of women and to undertake significant work on the human rights of women. Strengthened collaboration is needed to accelerate implementation of this agenda and to ensure that it remains a priority of all stakeholders. We therefore look forward to your increased engagement in the work of the United Nations.

I would, for example, encourage all groups and networks represented here to be part of an important global initiative to remove violence and the threat of violence from the lives of women and girls in all parts of the world. The Secretary-General recently launched a multi-year campaign (2008-2015) “UNite to end violence against women” which aims to enhance advocacy at global levels, strengthen partnerships for action at regional and national levels, and increase the leadership role of the United Nations. The Secretary-General has called on all stakeholders and actors - including Governments, United Nations entities and other international and regional organizations, NGOs, the private sector, media and men’s groups and networks - to work with him on eradicating this significant human rights abuse by 2015.

Many of the participants here today have expressed their admiration for the courage and persistence of the women who lay behind the Seneca Falls Conference and Declaration of Sentiments in 1848 but have also raised concerns that we have fallen short of their ambitions. Many have noted that the process of change has been too slow. The President of the Conference Committee, Joan Bozer, has pointed out on a number of occasions that the excellent women’s groups and networks around the country would be a much stronger force for change if they could be mobilized to work together.

The dialogues you are initiating here today will provide an important means of mobilizing women and men who support gender equality and the human rights of women. It is positive that you have also linked the discussion of the national developments with the global perspective through the work of the United Nations. With

its very significant historical past, Seneca Falls could be a drawing point for a dynamic movement for change to ensure full achievement of the goals voiced here 160 years ago.

In this context, it is particularly encouraging to see the large numbers of young women, and some young men, attending the dialogue today. There is a need to engage both young women and men in accelerating the efforts to secure human rights for women and girls in all parts of the world.

This first Seneca Falls Dialogue - tracing the movement for women's rights in the United States and linking it to historical global landmark in the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights - makes a critical contribution to our collective effort. It highlights the important role of civil society in ensuring the accountability of the State, and of society at large, for eliminating discrimination based on sex and achieving the equal rights of men and women.

It has been a honour for me to participate and I wish you great success in all your important work.

Thank you.