

**Presentation by Ms Carolyn Hannan, Director,
Division for the Advancement of Women
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

**At the Regional Meeting in preparation for the 15-year review of the
implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
Economic Commission for Europe, Geneva
2-3 November 2009.**

Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe, Mr Kubis
Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Mr Jagland
Excellencies and Distinguished Participants

I am honoured to address this important regional review of fifteen years of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. I am greatly encouraged by the evidence this meeting provides of the very strong continued regional commitment to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women. I also congratulate the Economic Commission for Europe, in particular the Executive Secretary, Ms Kubis, and Mr Patrice Robineau and the Gender Equality Team of ECE on the successful organization of this important meeting.

It is almost 35 years since the First World Conference on Women and the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), which set the stage for a new era in global, regional and national efforts to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. The overall vision of “equality – development – peace” established at that Conference 35 years ago continues to guide us today. The momentum generated in the following World Conferences on Women in Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985 culminated in the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Beijing in 1995, which remains the global policy framework at global, regional and national levels. The issues raised in the Platform for Action – in particular the 12 critical areas of concern – remain extremely relevant today.

Since the Fourth World Conference in Beijing in 1995, we have reviewed progress in achieving the goals set at five yearly intervals – in 2000, in 2005 and now in 2010. This review process provides us with a unique opportunity to highlight and celebrate achievements, as well as to identify gaps and challenges and exchange information on the actions required to best address these gaps and challenges and move forward in achievement of the goals of gender equality and empowerment of women. In this review process, as in the previous processes, regional reviews such as this one are being carried out to contribute to the global review which will be held in the Commission on the Status of Women in New York from 1-12 March 2010. At its session in March 2009, the Commission decided that the review should emphasize the sharing of experiences and good practices, with a view to overcoming remaining obstacles and new challenges, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals [Further

information on the fifteen-year review is available in a briefing note at the back of the room.]

This fifteen-year review process will be particularly significant for a number of reasons. While the Commission on the Status of Women is meeting from 1-12 March, the General Assembly will also hold a meeting to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The outcome of the review in the Commission on the Status of Women will feed into the 2010 Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council which will focus on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. And the outcome of the Commission – particularly through its focus on the linkages between the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals - will also provide an important contribution to the high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals to be held in the General Assembly in September 2010. In addition, we should keep in mind that the Security Council will commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 in October 2010.

In the Declaration adopted at the ten-year review in 2005, Member States called for further action to ensure the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Since 2005, there have been positive developments in a number of critical areas. While significant gaps and challenges also remain in these areas, it is important to acknowledge the achievements made.

In October 2006, the Secretary-General of the United Nations launched his in-depth study on violence against women and subsequent strong General Assembly resolutions on intensification of efforts to eradicate violence against women have led to increased action at global, regional and national levels. The Secretary-General's database on violence against women, requested by the General Assembly, is now established. The database, which is the first global "one-stop site" on measures taken by Member States to combat violence, will contain information on the extent, nature and consequences of all forms of violence against women, and on the impact and effectiveness of policies and programmes for combating such violence. Although the database was only launched in March 2009, information has already been provided by 81 countries and entered into the database. An inventory of a wide range of activities by United Nations entities is updated regularly and the Interagency Taskforce on Violence against Women continues its work in ten pilot countries to develop coordinated and coherent approaches to supporting the efforts of Member States to combat violence.

The Secretary-General's campaign on violence against women: "Unite to end violence against women", which was launched at the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2008, has significantly strengthened the focus on this scourge at global, regional and national levels and has engaged a broad range of stakeholders – including Member States, United Nations entities, international and regional organizations, Non-governmental organizations and other civil society organizations such as the private sector and the media.

Follow-up to Security Council resolution 1325 has been significantly strengthened since 2005, with the development of national plans for implementation by an increasing number of Member States. The adoption by the Security Council of three new resolutions, in particular 1820 and 1888 on sexual violence in armed conflict, must be seen as an important milestone. With these new resolutions, the Security Council signaled its resolve to intensify actions to ensure that violence against women during armed conflict is eliminated. Concerted efforts are now needed to ensure full implementation of these resolutions to bring about real change on the ground.

The Declaration adopted at the ten-year review in 2005 recognized that the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the fulfillment of the commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are mutually reinforcing in achieving gender equality and empowerment of women. Over the past five years, ratification of the Convention and its Optional Protocol has continued steadily. Today, 186 countries have ratified the Convention and 98 have ratified the Optional Protocol. The backlog of reports to be considered by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is significantly reduced. And it is particularly heartening that so many Member States refer in their national statements in the Commission on the Status of Women and the General Assembly to the importance of the Convention for their work at national level and their concrete efforts to ensure its full implementation on the ground. In December this year, the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention and the tenth anniversary of the adoption of its Optional Protocol are being celebrated around the world.

The Commission on the Status of Women has continued to play an important role in further advancing the global policy agenda on gender equality and empowerment of women, and in acting as a catalyst for the full implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy. Since 2005, the Commission highlighted four critical areas - the equal participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels; the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against girls; the financing of gender equality and empowerment of women; the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS. In each of these areas, the Commission developed concrete recommendations for action at global, regional and national levels to advance the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In its new working methods adopted in 2006, the Commission also decided to carry out annual reviews of progress in implementation of its agreed conclusions on priority themes adopted at earlier sessions. Since 2006, the Commission has reviewed progress in implementation of its recommendations on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality; women's participation in peace processes; and the equal participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels.

The continued development of strong and vibrant networks of civil society groups, at national, regional and global levels, has been a positive development. Women's groups and networks, have increased in strength and have played a very strategic role in moving the global agenda on gender equality forward – in particular in relation to violence against women, women, peace and security and the CEDAW Convention. Non-governmental organizations have energized the debates on these critical areas. A great deal of the sustained attention and the achievements made has been due to their efforts. Their role in advocating for and monitoring implementation of the commitments made by Governments has been particularly significant. The increasing partnerships between Governments and civil society are creating new and important synergies.

While recognizing these importance advances, it is necessary to also acknowledge and discuss the lack of progress in many other areas. Despite efforts by Member States, the United Nations system and civil society since 2005, lack of implementation of the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in a number of critical areas remains a serious issue.

It is of particular concern that horrific forms of violence against women in situations of armed conflict and in post-conflict contexts continue and that impunity for these gross violations of women's human rights persists. The violence against women that exists in all societies is exacerbated in conflict and post-conflict situations. Effective efforts to address violence in conflict and post conflict situations requires increased attention to addressing the existence of and tolerance for violence in society in general, including in societies not experiencing conflict.

It is also of great concern that Millennium Development Goal 5 on maternal health is the MGD where least progress has been made. The global maternal mortality ratio declined by only 0.4 per cent annually between 1990 and 2005, a rate far below the 5.5 per cent annual decline necessary to meet the Goal 5 target of reducing the maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015. According to UNFPA, every minute, a woman dies of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth from mostly preventable and treatable medical problems – a shocking statistic of more than 500,000 women die every year as a result of complications during pregnancy and childbirth..

Women's participation in decision-making is an area where the pace of change has also been very slow and uneven across regions. Positive change has taken place in many countries, for example Rwanda where parity has been achieved, but the global average for women's representation in national parliaments is only 18.4 per cent. In other areas, such as the media, academia, and the judiciary, the lack of reliable, comparable data on women's participation in decision-making is a serious constraint. In the area of economic decision-making, for example, despite considerable evidence on the positive impact of women's representation, women are consistently absent from key decision-making bodies influencing the distribution of resources in both public and private sectors.

In the context of the current financial and economic crisis it is important to highlight the serious persistent gaps in women's access to and control over resources.

Long-standing inequalities in access to economic and financial resources have placed women at a disadvantage in relation to men in economic development. Despite their increased participation in the workforce, women are disproportionately represented in informal work, which is generally precarious, poorly paid, and not covered by labour legislation or social protection. Women's wages, according to the International Trade Union Confederation, are 16.5 per cent less than men's. The persistent unequal sharing of unpaid work between women and men, including care-giving, influences women's choices in the labour market.

Although women require access to a range of financial services – including savings, insurance, remittance transfers and credit - to allow them to fully benefit from economic opportunities, many women remain excluded from the formal financial sector. Microfinance institutions, while successful in reaching out to women, have not necessarily always empowered women. In particular, they have failed to meet the needs of successful women entrepreneurs wishing to expand their businesses. Women's livelihood strategies in many parts of the world also require access to a range of productive resources. In many parts of the world, however, women continue to face discrimination in access to land, housing and property, as well as the infrastructure, services and technologies needed to facilitate their effective use of these resources. And without access to the economic resources provided through social protection, many women around the world are unable to insure themselves against contingencies arising from old age, ill-health, disability, unemployment and other life-crises. Even when economic rights for women exist, they may not be enforced or women may not be able to claim these rights because of socio-cultural norms and practices. Efforts are needed to make the judicial systems more accessible and responsive to women and to provide legal aid to women seeking to claim their rights.

One of the important findings in the ten-year review of implementation in 2005 was the gap between the global policy development on gender equality and empowerment of women and implementation at national level. Addressing this gap has been at the centre of the General Assembly's consideration of the reform of the gender equality architecture in the United Nations over the past three years. The adoption of General Assembly resolution A.RES/63/311, endorsing the development of one composite gender equality entity through the merger of the four existing gender equality entities - OSAGI, DAW, UNIFEM and INSTRAW - has been hailed as a new milestone in the United Nations efforts for gender equality and empowerment of women. The composite entity, headed by an Under-Secretary-General is expected to significantly enhance the support of the United Nations system to the efforts of Member States at national level.

The United Nations system is therefore at the cusp of major change in its work on gender equality and women's empowerment. The adoption of resolution A/RES/63/311 is an indication of the willingness and readiness of Member States to move forward with implementation of the needed changes in the gender equality architecture. The Secretary-General is solidly behind a strengthened United Nations entity and has expressed his willingness to move expeditiously to respond to the resolution in order to bring the new

gender equality entity into being as soon as possible. Expectations are high, and justifiably so. The time is ripe for this change.

We look forward to your unwavering support as we work to prepare the proposals for the design of a new composite entity that would be better resourced, have stronger field presence and a greater capacity to serve the Member States and all the women of the world. We look to Member States for a swift decision. The finalization of this process on the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action would indeed be a fulfilling achievement and a reaffirmation that the efforts of Member States, the United Nations system and women's organizations have been worthwhile.

The whole United Nations stands ready to support Governments, civil society and other stakeholders in this region in their efforts to ensure the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at national level.

I wish you every success in your discussions and I am confident that you will be able to close this meeting with a sense of satisfaction at having taken another important step forward towards our common goal – the realization of gender equality and empowerment of women.

Thank you.