

**Opening Remarks by Carolyn Hannan
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**At the parallel event on “Local policies and gender governance towards a caring
society”**

**Organized by the Seoul Foundation for Women and Family
United Nations Headquarters
Tuesday 3 March 2009**

Madame Moderator
Madame Park
Distinguished panellists and participants

It is my pleasure to make introductory congratulatory remarks at this event on “*Local policies and gender governance towards a caring society*” organized by the Seoul Foundation of Women and Family. I congratulate the Foundation, and in particular Madam Park, for this initiative to follow-up the event organized at the 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and to keep the issue of gender equality in cities on the agenda at the Commission.

In August 2007 I attended a conference on “*Global City Strategies for Implementing Policies on Gender Equality*” organized in Seoul by the Seoul Foundation of Women and Family, under the auspices of the Seoul Metropolitan Government. During my visit to Seoul, I was impressed by the many initiatives in support of women undertaken by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the Seoul Foundation of Women and Family and renew my congratulations on this international conference which led to the work here in the Commission on the Status of Women.

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As we discussed last year, the urban environment can be a site of both empowerment and exploitation for women. Cities offer many advantages for women, but there are also many challenges. Compared with rural areas, many cities offer better facilities and services, such as water, transport, education, child care and health care. They provide more opportunities for social, economic, cultural and political participation. Women can also usually access more diverse employment opportunities in cities. There are possibilities to engage in community politics at different levels. Enhanced access to information, including through the media and new information and communication technologies (ICT), is another advantage for women. In cities women can more easily access sports, recreation and cultural facilities.

Urban poverty can, however, negate the potential advantages of cities for women. Women in poor communities do not have the same access to infrastructure – including transport, services and employment opportunities - as more affluent women in the same cities. We also noted last year the importance of recognizing that women are not a homogeneous group and there are significant differences and inequalities between groups of women living in cities, including on the basis of race and age, which must be recognized and given particular attention.

Women are still far from being represented equitably in political and administrative decision-making in urban development. Their voices are not systematically brought into the

consultation and dialogue around city planning. As a result, city institutions, facilities, and services are not always conceived with their needs, priorities and contributions in mind, which can result in, among other things, inefficient public services with inappropriate opening hours.

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I am pleased that the Foundation decided to focus this event on the priority theme of the Commission: “*The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS*”. The priority theme has already generated considerable interest. There are a number of important inter-linkages with urban development which deserve attention.

It is significant that although women are increasingly entering the labour market in all parts of the world, this does not necessarily lead to more equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. Women either take on a “double-shift” by attempting to undertake paid work while continuing to have the sole responsibility for unpaid work, or they hire other women as domestic workers to undertake the household and care work they no longer have time to do – which opens up serious issues related to decent work since many women work for low wages, with no social security and risk of exploitation. Women may also seek care services provided by the state or the private sector but in many parts of the world this is not an option. This creates a challenge for local government and urban development.

The policy response on unpaid work and caregiving has been generally poor. Some countries have worked to provide and improve services outside the home, but these efforts have not in any way matched the need in many parts of the world. Many countries have also focused on labour market interventions – to provide leaves (maternity, paternity, parental) and to ensure flexible working arrangements, including part-time work, which allow reconciliation of work and family responsibilities. Many also provide a range of social security measures, such as child benefits and various forms of cash transfers. In developing countries, infrastructure and service provision have been important policy responses, including improving access to water and energy sources, improving transport facilities and ensuring that the opening times of schools and other government services take into account that both women and men undertake paid employment outside the home. Urban planners must take caregiving needs into account in developing infrastructure and services.

There are many challenges in policy responses on the sharing of responsibilities related to unpaid work, including caregiving, including the fact that addressing care needs has implications for a range of sectors and a holistic approach is needed. Policy responses must challenge the existing unequal sharing of responsibilities and not build on or reinforce these. There have been examples of well-meant policy responses which have reinforced notions of women as the ideal caregivers by only providing maternity leave and part-time work for women and ignoring the responsibilities of men.

One major challenge is the fact that the unpaid domestic work and caregiving, which is so essential for the survival and wellbeing of families and communities, remains invisible. It is not measured in national accounts and thus is unrecognized and unvalued. Local government and urban planners could do much to rectify this situation and ensure that this critical work gets more policy attention.

One important factor emerging from the research on this topic is the need for a stronger focus on men and significantly increased attention to stereotypes which are

embedded in many social institutions and maintain the unequal sharing of responsibilities, to the detriment of both women and men. While stereotypes result in women continuing to shoulder the major burden of household and care work, they also constrain men from taking on more responsibilities, and they deprive families of the benefit of the active involvement of both women and men. The need to focus on men's responsibilities for families in urban planning was discussed at the conference in Seoul in 2007.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has exacerbated the challenges of caregiving, in particular in areas where health systems are failing under the burden of care needs, and where the need for home-based care has increased. Home-based caregivers lack adequate support, are subjected to discrimination and stigma, and because the caregiving is so labour-intensive, are unable to sustain their livelihoods and maintain the wellbeing of their families. The crisis of care in the context of HIV/AIDS has illustrated that, while the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men is important, it will not be sufficient. A range of actors must be also involved in response to caregiving – including governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and international donors. Urban planners have a key role to play in this context in alleviating some of the burdens and risks that caregivers face.

It is an increasing cause for concern that it may become more difficult to achieve many of the desired policy responses to this priority theme because of the impact of the financial crisis. Provision of the types of services and facilities required may not be possible because of lack of resources. A challenge will be to keep the focus on social development and gender equality in the context of a response to the financial crisis that is, to date, largely couched in terms of macro-economic policy and changes in the financial architecture.

Planning of housing and urban communities – facilities, services and infrastructure - should be based on the needs, priorities and contributions of women as well as men – and should take into account the need to promote equal sharing of responsibilities for unpaid work, including caregiving, between women and men.

There are many good practice examples to build on. Women have often been actively engaged as leaders and participants at community level in urban areas. They have demonstrated considerable enterprise in addressing the challenges of urban poverty, providing some of the most creative grassroots initiatives, such as savings clubs, soup kitchens, communal care facilities and organizing efforts to engage and co-operate with local authorities around access to services.

Many women have pressed for participation in civic organizations to ensure that these have a distributive agenda which meets the needs of poor families and communities. The contribution of women to slum upgrading and services delivery, whether in cash or in kind, has been considerable. They are often the first to find the user fees required or provide community labour, and they are invariably involved in maintenance responsibilities associated with community management, particularly when these functions are unpaid. The challenge is to build on these initiatives of women, without inadvertently increasing their unequal responsibilities for unpaid work, including caregiving, which is so important for the survival of families and communities.

Policies, plans, resource allocations and programmes in cities need to more effectively target the particular needs and priorities related to unpaid work and caregiving and aim to ensure more equitable sharing between women and men.

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Let me also briefly take the opportunity to remind you about the United Nations Secretary-General's multi-year campaign to eradicate violence against women: "UNiTE to end violence against women" which will run until 2015, to coincide with the target-date for the MDGs. The Secretary-General has called on all stakeholders to work with him in achieving this critical mission – through increasing global advocacy, strengthening the work at national level, and through the United Nations leading by example. Stakeholders are encouraged to find ways to make visible contributions to the campaign. Violence against women is an important issue in cities. It would be important to find ways to make a significant contribution to the Secretary-General's campaign, highlighting the need to address violence against women and girls in cities.

Thank you.