

Talking Points for Ambassador Ali Hachani

“Enhancing Women’s Global Leadership through Information Technology (IT)” Side event to the Commission on the Status of Women

**Organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Office for ECOSOC
Support and Coordination and AIT Global**

New York, 8 March 2006

Excellencies,
Mr. Under-Secretary-General,
Distinguished guests,

As President of the Economic and Social Council and on this International Woman’s Day, it is my honour to address this meeting on “Enhancing Women’s Global Leadership through Information Technology” which is taking place alongside the Fiftieth Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

As you may know, the Economic and Social Council – ECOSOC – is responsible for promoting higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress; facilitating international cultural and educational cooperation; and encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Council serves as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues, and for formulating policy recommendations addressed to Member States and the United Nations system. The Charter of the United Nations also established the Economic and Social Council as the principal organ to coordinate economic, social, and related work of the specialized agencies, regional commissions and functional commissions – one of which is the Commission on the Status of Women.

The Commission on the Status of Women – CSW – was established by ECOSOC in June 1946 to promote the advancement of women throughout the world. The Commission initially focused on legal measures to protect the human rights of women and awareness-raising on the status and situation of women around the world. By the mid 1960s, the Commission had begun to address women’s role in economic and social development. The Commission has made a decisive contribution in organizing and following-up the world conferences on women in Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995. Since 1996, the main focus of work of the Commission on the Status of Women has been the review and implementation of the twelve critical areas of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The many United Nations conferences and summits held in the last decade and a half addressed a wide spectrum of subjects -- from Sustainable Development to Human Settlements, and from Trade and Development to Natural Disaster Reduction. They provided us with a shared vision of development. In the last five years especially – since

the Millennium Summit in 2000 – our approaches have evolved around a comprehensive global development agenda originating from the Millennium Declaration and the goals embodied in the outcomes of these conferences and summits.

Within the United Nations system, ECOSOC has an important role in contributing to the progress towards the conference goals by helping to maintain focus on these goals, promoting their coordinated implementation and addressing common themes, both at intergovernmental level and in countries' development strategies. In the period ahead, one of the Council's key challenges will be to deepen the engagement between ECOSOC and the functional commissions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Almost 20,000 representatives of governments, business, civil society, international organizations and media visited my country in November 2005 for the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society -- WSIS. The WSIS was organized, in part, to marshal the global consensus and commitment required to promote access to information, knowledge and communication technologies for development in all countries so the world's citizens might reap the full benefits of the ICT revolution.

Organized in two phases, first in Geneva in 2003 and then in Tunis in 2005, the WSIS set an unprecedented baseline in United Nations processes for the involvement of all stakeholders – this was not just a Summit of States. National and regional preparatory events provided a channel for a broad range of input into the process. Preparatory committee meetings were attended not only by government representatives, but also civil society, private sector and academia. These consultations culminated in a UN Summit that represented a landmark in openness. The two-phase format, too, was an innovation, allowing for greater participation and providing an opportunity to measure progress in the two years between phases.

The outcome of such a bold experiment is a vision of an inclusive, people-centered and development-oriented Information Society, and a well-grounded, action-oriented plan to achieve that vision. I would like particularly to stress the words “development-oriented” as the outcomes clearly stress that WSIS implementation and follow-up should be seen as advancing our common efforts to achieve internationally agreed development goals. Indeed, access to ICT is not an end in itself, but rather a tool that can help more effectively address other challenges including poverty, disease, discrimination, ignorance and exclusion.

The WSIS outcome documents affirm that ICT provide enormous opportunities for women, who should be an integral part of, and key actors in the Information Society. I would like to stress these words: “key actors”. The Tunis Commitment underscores that full participation of women in the Information Society is necessary to ensure inclusiveness and respect for human rights.

Providing training in science and technology for women and girls was an important focus in the outcome of both phases of the Summit. Special attention was given to ICT applications such as e-health and e-employment, which can dramatically improve the lives of women. There was also a focus on some of the challenges, such as cultural and linguistic barriers to women's access to and use of ICT, as well as unbalanced and stereotypical portrayal of women in the media.

The closing ceremony in Tunis did not mark the end of our work. The challenge that we now all face is how to realize our goal of forming an inclusive and development-oriented Information Society. For WSIS to truly become a "Summit of Solutions" for ICT Development, it is incumbent upon all of us to translate the WSIS principles into concrete and meaningful actions. The WSIS Tunis Agenda provides us with a map of our destination. Now we must formulate the route to reach that goal.

If there is one single task that we face in this context, it is the urgent need to demonstrate to policy-makers that technology is not a gender-neutral phenomenon. As Mr. Ocampo has just noted in his welcome statement, there is a gender divide in the access to and usage of ICT. If this is addressed, ICT could have tremendous opportunities to be a powerful tool for women's empowerment.

The Economic and Social Council was endowed with the task of overseeing the follow-up to the Geneva and Tunis outcomes to the Summit. It provides the opportunity to ensure coherence with the integrated process of follow-up to major UN Conferences and Summits and to mainstream the WSIS outcomes in the broader framework of the UN development agenda, with a view to bringing us closer to the attainment of our common goals by 2015. I noted earlier in my statement that this is at the heart of ECOSOC's work.

Consistent with the spirit of inclusiveness that guided the WSIS process from the start, the Tunis Agenda shows that building a development-oriented Information Society is, indeed, a collaborative effort that involves the full engagement of all sectors in society. Throughout the course of this meeting, I urge each of you to contemplate what you and your organization are contributing or might contribute to ensure that all people – women and men – have access to and enjoy the benefits of information and communication technologies to improve their quality of life.

I thank you for this opportunity to present ECOSOC's role in the United Nations, the WSIS process, and how the two come together as we move forward in the implementation phase. This meeting has an important place in what must be a global, multisectoral response to the challenges impeding our attainment of the equitable, human-centered Information Society to which we all aspire. I wish you all the best and wish to assure you that gender mainstreaming is and will be at the focus of our work.