

2006 High Level Segment of ECOSOC, 3-5 July 2006

Introductory remarks

By

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at

Roundtable on “Innovation at work: national strategies to achieve gender equality in employment”

5 July 2006

Madame Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to moderate this Roundtable on “Innovation at work: national strategies to achieve gender equality in employment” and share this opportunity with my colleague, Ms. Mari Simonen, Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund. I wish to pay tribute to our colleagues from DAW, ILO, UNIFEM and UNFPA who organized this event. I wish to take this opportunity to commend the work of ILO and Mr. Juan Somavía, its Director General, for their strenuous efforts in the global fight to generate full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men.

I wish to recognize our distinguished panelists: Ms. Anne Kathrine Slungård, Marketing Director, Entra Real Estate and Chairperson, Statoil Board of Elections of Norway; Ms. Shanti Chadha, Managing Director, Nepal Woman Crafts; Ms. Barbara Byers, Executive Vice-President Canadian Labour Congress and Member of ILO Governing Body; and Ms. Awa Wade, Deputy General Secretary, National Union of Educators, Senegal.

I believe that this Panel is most timely, inasmuch as the discussions on new initiatives and practical strategies to achieve the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people, contained in the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2005 World Summit are at an important stage in ECOSOC. These goals are increasingly at the centre of national and international development policies and strategies, including poverty reduction strategies, as part of efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The main objective of this roundtable is, thus, to engage in a dialogue on innovative national strategies for achieving gender equality in the labour market. This dialogue would inform policy and planning at the national, regional and international levels, encourage increased advocacy, raise awareness and build capacity, and promote the involvement of employers’ organizations, trade unions, private sector and civil society.

Women are key contributors to the economy and to combating poverty, through both remunerated and unremunerated work at home, in the community and the workplace. Growing numbers of women have achieved economic independence through gainful employment. However, gender stereotypes and discrimination continue to limit women's access to the labour market and push them into low-productive, poorly-paid and inadequately-protected jobs, primarily in the informal economy. As a result, women's access to paid employment is lower than men's in most of the developing world: women in Southern Asia, Western Asia and Northern Africa still hold only about 20 per cent of paying jobs in sectors outside of agriculture and over 60 per cent of unpaid workers in family enterprises worldwide are women.

Failure to create full and productive employment for women not only has direct costs to women in the form of high rates of unemployment and underemployment, lower earnings and higher poverty, but also societal costs in the form of lost economic growth opportunities, tax-base erosion and increased welfare costs. Moreover, studies have shown that companies with higher representation of women on their top management teams actually experienced better financial performance than companies with lower representation of women in such positions.¹

The promotion of productive employment and decent work for women requires concerted action among various government ministries. It needs effective coordination between central and local institutions as well as public and private agencies, and partnerships with representatives of civil society, such as parliamentarians, human rights' advocates, women's and youth organizations and the private sector.

I hope that today we will be able to give even very few but valuable action-oriented inputs into the discussion of these critical issues which are under intensive discussion in ECOSOC. To this effect, I suggest that:

- Speakers address innovative approaches to achieving gender equality in employment and the challenges in realizing this goal; and
- Delegations contribute to the roundtable discussion by sharing country-specific innovations and good practices in creating productive employment and decent work for all and in promoting gender equality.

Allow me to give the floor to our first speaker, Ms. Anne Kathrine Slungård, of Norway.

¹Studies such as: Adler, Roy D. (2001) "Women in the Executive Suite Correlate to High Profits" Glass Ceiling Research Center, Pepperdine University; "The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity." 2004 Catalyst, sponsored by BMO Financial Group; and Wirth, Linda (2001) "Breaking through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management", and the 2004 Update, ILO, Geneva.