

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**Statement by
MR. SHA ZUKANG
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
Introduction of the Reports of the Secretary-General
(Annual Ministerial Review and the thematic discussion)**

New York, 30 June 2010

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the pleasure of introducing the reports of the Secretary-General for the fourth Annual Ministerial Review and for this year's thematic discussion – both of which concern progress made toward empowering women and promoting gender equality.

A key focus of the report on the 2010 AMR reviews the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. As you know, the Platform for Action is the global policy framework for gender equality, women's human rights and the empowerment of women. Launched in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the Platform builds on commitments made at other world conferences on women held in Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and Nairobi in 1985 as well as other summits in the 1990s.

Since Beijing, much has changed in the situation of the world's women and girls. Allow me to share a few examples of good progress:

Women's access to employment opportunities has slowly increased;

The establishment of social safety nets and micro-credit schemes has empowered women and increased their level of social protection and alleviated poverty;

Women's role in agriculture and food security has improved. In some places they have gained greater access to land, property and water resources;

Access to education has increased globally for girls at all levels, particularly in primary education;

Some countries have prioritized women's access to health services, including for reproductive health;

Crimes that involve violence against women are warranting more attention and _ at the global, regional and national levels;

And there has been slow but steady progress in the number of women holding seats in parliaments;

Despite these accomplishments, the reports reveal a number of concerns that hinder progress. Societies need to include boys and men much more in their efforts to promote gender equality. Men need to be educated about women's human rights and trained on how they can promote and protect those rights in schools, workplaces and homes. Indeed, in so many societies, the promise of future gender equality is dependent on the buy-in and support of men.

Another cause for concern is the very high number of women that have low-paid or vulnerable jobs with limited or no social protection, basic rights or voices at work. At the global level, the share of vulnerable employment - which includes unpaid family workers and independent workers — in total female employment was 52.7 per cent in 2007, as compared with 49.1 per cent for men.

Women's employment levels have also been more negatively impacted by the economic crisis than those of men, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Another key weakness presented in the reports is the still-inadequate representation of women in all facets of economic and political decision-making. There has been some modest progress, but not enough. As of November 2009, women filled 18.8 per cent of seats in lower chambers of parliament as compared to 11.3 per cent in 1995. The 30 per cent target set in the 1990s, however, has been met only in twenty-four countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. One quarter of all parliamentary chambers have less than 10 per cent women members and nine chambers have no women members at all

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These numbers are unacceptable. Political representation is vital. It is a linchpin for advancing gender equality. Without more women in government offices, we may only see small gains for women in education and employment and health in many societies. Progress in this area needs to quicken considerably. What can each of you do at your national levels? And then what can we do, as an international community, to advance progress? Let us focus on this ladies and gentlemen; the importance of getting more women in political offices cannot be underestimated.

Mr. President,

The achievement of internationally-agreed development goals, especially the Millennium Development Goals, is severely compromised in societies where women and girls are not allowed to contribute equally. The report for the thematic discussion presents trends that explain the challenges we face in this regard. Allow me to briefly highlight four of those trends.

First, systemic weaknesses in the global economy have not been resolved. Women, therefore, will continue to suffer increased rates of unemployment, poverty and health problems. Even in the "boom" years of a few years back, women received too few employment and social

development opportunities – and now they receive far fewer. What can we do to highlight this problem? How can we push for economic recovery measures that specifically help women?

Second, poor farmers and smallholders, the majority of them women, bear the brunt of increased pressures from food insecurity. This is due largely to rising food and energy prices, lower incomes, increasing unemployment and shifting crop patterns. Women farmers cultivate more than half of the global food production, yet they are among the most disadvantaged farmers and are most quickly affected by price volatility.

Third, the most severe impacts of climate change are experienced disproportionately by women. In natural disasters brought about by climate change, women and girls often suffer the most. We need to keep this point central in our discussions: climate change endangers the livelihoods and lives of women more than those of men. What can you do at your national levels to correct this imbalance? And how can we add rigor to our collective efforts on this front, especially in our work on climate change financing?

Fourth, the humanitarian crises intensify gender inequalities and sets back progress made toward the MDGs. Women often have unequal access to health care in such crises. When they are injured or sick, whole families sink further into poverty. All forms of gender-based violence, in particular sexual violence, increase during humanitarian crises. These crimes have devastating effects on the health and well-being of women and can set back the progress of whole communities.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

The international community must overcome these challenges to gender equality through policy interventions. These reports reiterate the need to make the global partnership for development responsive to the specific needs and priorities of women and girls. Strong political commitment is required, along with strong leadership at all levels. National development plans and poverty reduction strategies need to include concrete actions and deadlines that address the needs of women.

Investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect. We cannot overemphasize that statement. Experience has shown that investing in a woman's health, education, and employment opportunities has myriad benefits for her family, community and society. When women are granted the same rights and opportunities as men, a tremendous source of human potential is unleashed.

I am confident that this session of the Council will be successful in informing the international community of progress made in this arena and motivating all of us work harder to advance the status of women throughout the world.

Thank you.
