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STATEMENT BY

**H.E. AMBASSADOR SYLVIE LUCAS
PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
AT
THE OPENING OF THE FIFTY-THIRD SESSION
OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

2 MARCH 2009

Mr. Chairperson,
Ms. Deputy Secretary-General,
Distinguished delegates,

It is an honour for me to address the opening of the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women in my capacity as President of the Economic and Social Council. I would like to assure you of the full support of ECOSOC for the efforts of the Commission on the Status of Women to advance the global agenda on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Your Commission will focus at this session on the priority theme of “The Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS”. In choosing this theme, the Commission has recognized that gender equality and women’s empowerment cannot be fully achieved without the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men.

Inequalities in the sharing of domestic and caregiving responsibilities between women and men persists in all parts of the world, as a result of, among other things, unequal power relations between women and men and persisting stereotypes on the roles of women and men. As a consequence of their disproportionate share of responsibilities in the household, including for caregiving, women and girls face constraints in many areas, including in access to education and paid employment. The unequal sharing also constrains women’s opportunities to play a role in decision-making at all levels, an important theme being reviewed at this session of the Commission.

Distinguished delegates,

As women increasingly enter the labour market, there are significant implications for caregiving. It is interesting to note that the unequal sharing of these responsibilities between women and men is however not necessarily reduced as women take up paid work. Instead, the unpaid work in households is often taken on by other women, who come from disadvantaged groups, including migrant women, and typically earn low wages and have little or no social protection. In contexts where paid care is provided, in both the informal and formal sector, this work tends to be disproportionately done by women.

The economic value of women's unpaid work is also not adequately recognized and valued, including in national accounts, thus undermining the recognition of women's role in social development and their contribution to economic growth. This has implications in the context of the emerging global financial crisis.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has further increased the care-giving responsibilities of women and girls, especially where health systems fail. These responsibilities include the day-to-day care of people living with HIV/AIDS as well as the care of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. These extra responsibilities have enormous implications for the health and well-being of women themselves, and impact their ability to sustain their livelihoods and provide support to their families.

There is increasing recognition of the role that men must play to ensure equal sharing of responsibilities, including care for people living with HIV/AIDS. Many innovative measures have been developed to encourage and support men in this role, and I expect there will be active sharing of experiences, lessons learned and good practices in this area over the coming two weeks.

Despite the measures already taken, much more needs to be done to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities by men and women, including through appropriate legislation, policies, programmes, and awareness-raising and training activities. The agreed conclusions the Commission is going to adopt in this respect are therefore of particular importance. The policy recommendations will guide the work of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies.

Distinguished delegates,

The Economic and Social Council is working to increase its effectiveness as the principal United Nations body for coordination, policy review and guidance on economic and social development issues. The new methods of work of the Council, including the Annual Ministerial Review and the Development Cooperation Forum, are designed to advance the United Nations Development Agenda.

The Council has invited its functional commissions to contribute to the 2009 Annual Ministerial Review on the theme “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health”. I welcome the decision of this Commission to respond favorably to this request and to hold an expert panel on the gender perspectives of global public health. I look forward to participating in this event next week.

The Commission on the Status of Women has made significant efforts to increase effective collaboration with ECOSOC in recent years, including through active participation in annual meetings of the ECOSOC Bureau with the Chairpersons of the functional commissions, and in panels of Chairpersons of functional commissions during the substantive session. Equally important are the ongoing efforts of the Commission to foster collaboration with other functional commissions, including the work with the Statistical Commission on the development of indicators on violence against women, and the joint panel with the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice on legislation on violence against women to be held at this session.

Mr. Chairperson,
Ms. Deputy Secretary-General,
Distinguished delegates,

I would like to commend the Commission on its current working methods, which have a strong focus on promoting and monitoring implementation at the national level, including through interactive dialogue. As it decides on its new priority themes, I hope the Commission can identify themes that would allow it to provide input to the work of the Council and other intergovernmental bodies, to strengthen further its catalytic role in promoting gender equality, and to enhance collaboration with other bodies.

Because 2010 is the 15th anniversary of the Adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review in 2010 will focus on “Implementing the internationally agreed development goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women”. The Commission on the Status of Women will have an important opportunity to make a substantive contribution to this Annual Ministerial Review. I anticipate continued positive collaboration between ECOSOC and this Commission in the preparations for this important event.

I wish the Commission a very productive session and I look forward to its outcomes.

Thank you very much.