



**Statement by H.E. Mr. Hamidon Ali, President of ECOSOC,
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations**

**ECOSOC Special Event on
ENGAGING PHILANTHROPY TO PROMOTE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT
AND GENDER EQUALITY
22 February 2010**

Excellencies,
Your Grace,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome all of you to this ECOSOC special event to discuss how we can engage philanthropy to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In February last year, the Economic and Social Council brought together representatives from the corporate sector and the philanthropic community to discuss, together with Member State Governments and civil society representatives, how different stakeholders could work together to accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), specially focussing on the health-related development goals.

Today's meeting seeks to move forward the dialogue process initiated at last year's successful event. Its outcome will serve as an input to the Economic and Council's Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) during its high-level ministerial segment in July which will focus on the theme of gender equality and women's empowerment. With that

in mind, today's meeting will explore ways in which, together, governments, the philanthropic community and civil society can partner to promote two critical areas: women's economic empowerment and ending violence against women.

In September 2000 world leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration and set a target date of 2015 to achieve the MDGs to bring about improvement in the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable worldwide, in particularly women and children. However, much more needs to be done if we are to successfully achieve many of these targets. In particular, the goals related to the status of women are far from being met. The recent economic and financial crisis has further deepened gender inequality, as the downturn has affected women and men, girls and boys differently. Increasing natural calamities and their manifold impact pose further challenges towards bringing about gender equality, by creating new hurdles for the advancement of women. Last month's earthquake in Haiti, a country which ECOSOC has paid special interest to over the past decade, is a prime example. I encourage all of us here to pay special attention to the needs of women and girls as the country tries hard to recover from its devastating effects.

In preparation for this year's AMR, a variety of events, panel discussions, national, regional and global meetings will be held by the Council relating to the same theme. The ideas emanating from these meetings, including today's, could be incorporated into the ministerial declaration, which will be negotiated and adopted by Ministers during ECOSOC's annual substantive session in June/July 2010 here in New York.

Excellencies,
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I must emphasise here that there are many practical steps that can be taken to reduce gender inequalities which will reduce poverty and achieve higher levels of well-being in societies around the world. There are also many positive actions that can be

taken to empower women. But, without leadership and political will, the world will fall short of taking these practical steps—and meeting the goal we agreed to achieve by 2015.

While there are many continuing challenges are being faced in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment, it is important to note that there has been some recent progress as well. For example, worldwide, there are more young women than men enrolled in tertiary education. The share of women in paid employment outside the agricultural sector has continued to increase, and women are entering important political leadership positions. There are mechanisms in place to support women's economic and social empowerment and innovative programmes are producing remarkable results. The last 20 years have also seen some progress in the political attention paid to violence against women and girls, as well as in the number and scope of laws and policies to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. Nonetheless, first results are encouraging but still apply only to a small number of places. I must admit that the efforts are woefully under-resourced. Much more needs to be done to implement laws and commitments, and all stakeholders need to work closely together to face and overcome these challenges.

We must therefore augment our efforts to meet the challenges head on. We need to focus on areas of relative neglect or where progress has been weakest. Women and girls continuously lack the same access as men to education, health care, food, jobs, property and decision making powers in the political, social, and business sectors. Economists confirm that empowerment of women is a central engine for development – if they cannot participate, the targets governments and the United Nations set at the start of this millennium will continue to be unmet.

Distinguished participants,

As the complexity of economic and social issues affecting local and global communities continues to escalate, it has become increasingly clear that no single actor in the philanthropic arena can hope to match the impact of different stakeholders working together. I must say that each agent of change has unique skills and resources to bring to

bear on today's most difficult challenges. Over the past decade, public-private sector partnerships have become a creative and sophisticated mechanism for addressing priority challenges and to leverage the skills and resources of the private sector and civil society toward the goals of the United Nations. Partnerships are the lynchpin for advancing the Millennium Development Goals, and there is no doubt that these will not be reached by 2015 if we do not work together for their realisation.

I am encouraged by the response to my invitation to you for a proactive and continuous engagement in the work of the Council. I strongly believe that a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach has the potential to help promote the MDGs. I hope that our deliberations today will generate many new and exciting ideas and partnerships supporting our efforts to advance gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide.

Before I give the floor to H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, to make his opening address, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate him on his personal commitment to women's issues, in particular, his initiatives towards ending violence against women. Mr. Secretary-General, I am pleased to give you the floor.
