

**United Nations Office for Partnerships and the Business Civic Leadership  
Center Forum**

**Investing in Women and Entrepreneurship: Solutions to Addressing MDG3**

**8 March 2011**

**Closing Remarks for the Deputy-Secretary-General**

Distinguished participants, colleagues and friends,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to address the closing session of this Forum on “Investing in Women and Entrepreneurship: Solutions to Addressing MDG3”.

I congratulate all participants on their substantive and thought-provoking contributions to the discussions today. Your thinking is very much in line with the vision of the United Nations as we strive for accelerated progress toward the achievement of MDG3 on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Gender equality and women’s empowerment are increasingly being seen as integral to development in all societies worldwide. As you have heard from speakers today, investing in women and girls is not only morally right it makes good economic sense and contributes to the acceleration of the Millennium Development Goals. This year’s World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report revealed that out of 114 countries reviewed, those countries with greater gender equality were more competitive and grew faster.

Investing in women requires partnerships between Governments, the private sector, civil society and the United Nations system. I am pleased that you are all represented here today at this Forum.

It is critical that we build partnerships with all of you to facilitate women’s access to the labour market especially in light of the on-going financial and economic crisis, leading to more than 18 million women becoming unemployed around the world.

This Forum provides an excellent platform for expanding our networks of partners and exploring new venues for how we can work together on promoting the achievement of MDG3 and women’s economic empowerment.

We in the United Nations see women’s economic empowerment as a priority especially given its potential to alleviate poverty and improve the well being of societies at large. The newly created United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women -UN Women - headed by Ms. Michelle Bachelet, will be leading and coordinating and scaling up the UN systems’ work on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

In this regard, UN Women will strengthen and expand its collaboration with the UN Global Compact on the Women’s Empowerment Principles–Equality Means Business

Initiative. This offers practical guidance on concrete action that businesses can take to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community.

The Women's Empowerment Principles Initiative is a key engagement opportunity that brings together many of the themes discussed here today into a concrete roadmap for business on its critical role in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Business leaders are critical to the promotion of women's economic opportunities and decent work. I would like to thank those of you in the room who have already signed on to these principles.

Studies continue to show a strong correlation between the number of women in leadership and company boards and greater diversity with improved financial performance.

Going forward, we also need to explore how the private sector can integrate women in developing countries into the global value chains. For example, how can women farmers in Africa connect with consumers and companies in the US? How can businesses in the transport and construction sectors influence the building of roads that meet the needs of rural women farmers? How can we partner in building capacity of women entrepreneurs to be aware of the market demands and quality standards?

In some countries, the private sector has played an important role in investing in solar energy and other renewable energy sources. In these countries, solar power has not only allowed women's businesses to grow, but has also contributed to reduced burden of women to meet their household energy needs.

This group also has a role to play in promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment, through the effective use of popular culture, media and positive role models. Your products and marketing strategies all reflect how we perceive the role of women in the economy. Positive messages of women in non-traditional sectors and in leadership positions can help eliminate persistent gender stereotypes.

Before we close, I would like to briefly touch upon an issue very close to my heart, that of the education of women and girls.

As we all know, investing in women's and girls' education not only contribute directly to improved capacities of the workforce and to economic growth, it also critical for the wellbeing of women and their families.

It has been well established over the past decades that as female education rises, fertility, population growth, and infant and child mortality fall and family health improves. Children, especially daughters, of educated mothers are more likely to be enrolled in school and to have higher levels of educational attainment. Educated women are also more politically active and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them.

However, despite women's and girls' important progress in education, in some countries even surpassing men and boys, they find it difficult to find decent work and

full employment. Education needs to respond to the demands of the labour market to ensure that students can get jobs after graduation. Often, however, what is being taught at school does not always correspond to the demands of the labour market.

The education system needs to be flexible and follow the trends of the market. For example, skills in information and communication technologies have become a critical component in children's education. Without these skills women's economic opportunities would remain limited.

I encourage this group to consider working closely with the education system to better communicate the needs of your businesses to ensure that investments in education lead to full employment and decent work for women.

Women's access to training at the workplace is also critical. Not only does it expand women's leadership opportunities, it also leads women into a path of life-long building of knowledge and skills, critical for their decent work and full employment.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the organizers for this successful Forum, and to all of you, thank you very much for having contributed to a very productive dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment.