

**FORTY-NINTH SESSION
OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**GENERAL DISCUSSION
HIGH LEVEL PLENARY MEETING**

STATEMENT

BY

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Madame Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues,

The year 2005 marks a milestone in our collective efforts towards women's advancement, empowerment and gender equality. On this tenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, let me begin by reiterating UNESCO's full commitment to efforts promoting women's empowerment and building a future with gender equality in all its domains.

The policy context for UNESCO's actions in this area is set in the **Medium Term Strategy for 2002-2007**, which states, "a gender perspective will be integrated in policy, planning, programming, implementation and evaluation activities in all areas of UNESCO's competence with a view to promoting empowerment and achieving gender equality". This policy commitment is translated into practical guidance and well-defined lines of responsibility in the document **Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework, 2002-2007** prepared by the Women and Gender Equality Section of the Bureau of Strategic Planning in consultation with programme sectors and field office gender focal points. While the Women and Gender Equality Section of the Bureau of Strategic Planning has the overall responsibility for coordinating and ensuring the integration of a woman's empowerment and gender equality perspective in all of the Organization's programmes, each programme sector is also responsible for pursuing gender equality objectives in their own work.

Against this policy background and at this critical juncture where we review our individual and collective achievements, what conclusions can we draw regarding progress towards women's empowerment and gender equality from the perspective of UNESCO?

Since 1995, in the area of education, the international community has made remarkable progress in building global and national consensus around the centrality of girls and women's education to development processes and the fight against poverty. UNESCO's principal efforts towards the promotion of gender

equality are invested in meeting strategic objectives pertaining to education in the Beijing Platform for Action. These objectives are fully integrated into the Education for All (EFA) Goals adopted at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 and to a more limited extent in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals with regard to women's and girls' formal education.

UNESCO's role in this process, as coordinator of the EFA movement, has been to ensure that all partners in the movement are working towards the shared goals adopted at Dakar and that all efforts are mutually reinforcing. In addition, through the programmes of its education sector, including the Education Institutes, Regional Education Bureaux and field offices, UNESCO has been contributing to the achievement of the EFA and education-related MDG goals through focused actions at all levels of education from primary to tertiary levels, and through formal, non-formal and informal education.

Despite the documented correlations between education, literacy and human development, the current situation continues to cause concern and calls for intensified efforts. According to the 2003/4 EFA Global Monitoring Report, *Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality (UNESCO)*, only 52 countries out of 128 for which we have data will achieve gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005. Meanwhile, 54 countries risk not achieving this objective by 2015, thereby jeopardizing the possibility of fulfilling the gender equality goal by the same year.

As underlined in the EFA Report "the handicap to the realisation of gender equality in and throughout education is neither a lack of knowledge nor of policy options. The main requirement is to bring the necessary political commitment, expertise and resources together in order to respond to the urgency and centrality of the task".

UNESCO is fully committed to intensifying its own efforts in this area. UNESCO is the lead United Nations agency for the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012), as well as the United Nations Education for Sustainable Development Decade (2005-2015). UNESCO is also prepared to address the effects of new

challenges caused by phenomenon such as the increasingly female face of HIV/AIDS through its new Global Initiative on HIV/AIDS and Education.

UNESCO is equally committed to intensified efforts to integrate women's empowerment and gender equality perspectives in its other domains. Through its programmes in the Natural Sciences, UNESCO seeks to promote more gender responsive environmental management and disaster mitigation/management approaches and to enhance the equitable participation of women and men in science, engineering and technology, especially in decision-making and training opportunities. The Social and Human Sciences sector makes its contribution through programmes to promote human rights and combat discrimination as well as initiatives to enhance human security and peace-building.

Access to information and knowledge increasingly determines patterns of learning, cultural expressions and social participation. UNESCO is promoting women's and men's equal access to information, knowledge and participation in the media through the programmes of its Communication and Information sector. Meanwhile, gender equality issues are central to ongoing debates about the relationship between culture and development and also figure in the follow-up to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001). Regarding the newly emerging area of intangible cultural heritage, special attention is being paid to the importance of women-bearers in the renewal of transmission systems and women are central to our activities relating to crafts production in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) with a view to increasing their productivity and personal income.

As we gather here today to commemorate the Fourth World Conference on Women, we must look to the future with a clear vision of our common objectives and of the most effective strategies to achieve them – and to do better in realizing the targets the international community set itself voluntarily.

For UNESCO, the objectives of the advancement and empowerment of women and the achievement of gender equality are complementary. They also constitute a fundamental prerequisite for international development, peace and security. It is for this reason that the Beijing Platform for Action with its 12 critical areas of

concern, enriched with the analysis provided in the Beijing+5 outcome document, remains our reference and shall guide our work in the pursuit of all development agendas. The obligations accepted by Governments under international human rights treaties, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women will also continue to inform our efforts:

In the run-up to the review and appraisal of the five-year review of the implementation of the outcomes of the Millennium Summit to be held in September, UNESCO will make every effort to pursue this vision in a concrete manner, ensuring that women's needs, visions and interests are fully reflected in the preparatory process and in the implementation plans.

Thank you for your attention.