

**Informal Thematic Debate of the General Assembly
Promotion of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
6 March 2007**

Statement

by

**H.E. Ambassador Carmen Maria Gallardo
Chairperson, Commission on the Status of Women**

Madam President,

Distinguished delegates,

Representatives of non-governmental organizations and United Nations entities

It is a great honour for me to address this informal thematic debate of the General Assembly on “Promotion of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women” as Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women. I congratulate the President of the General Assembly for taking this initiative.

The fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which started on Monday, 26 February, is currently underway. At this session, the Commission has utilized the new methods of work adopted at its fiftieth session. It has focused on policy development under one priority theme – “The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child”, and reviewed progress in the implementation of its agreed conclusions on a priority theme from an earlier session – “The role of men and boys in promoting gender equality”. The Commission also considered an emerging issue – “Elimination of all forms of violence against women: Follow-up to the Secretary-General’s in-depth study at national and international levels”. With its new working methods, the Commission has continued its efforts to ensure a strong focus on national level implementation of its policy recommendations, including through the large number of opportunities provided during the session for interactive dialogue and exchange of experiences and lessons learned.

The preparations for and discussions during the Commission on the Status of Women have indicated a lack of focus on discrimination and violence against girls in all

parts of the world. Despite increased awareness on violence against women and violence against children, including through the pathbreaking studies recently presented by the Secretary-General to the Third Committee of this Assembly, the issues that specifically affect the girl-child, such as early marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting and girls in domestic service, as well as the particular vulnerabilities of girls under the HIV/AIDS pandemic and in armed conflicts and their aftermath, have not been adequately addressed.

Discrimination and violence against girls begin at the earliest stages of life and continue unabated throughout their lives. Girls often have less access to nutrition, health care and education and enjoy fewer rights, opportunities and benefits of childhood and adolescence than boys. They are subjected to various forms of violence, exploitation and violations of their human rights. Stereotypical attitudes and discriminatory practices continue to obstruct the full implementation of the global policy and legislative frameworks and laws and policies at national level.

The outcome of the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in the form of agreed conclusions, will provide concrete policy recommendations for Governments, the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders on the protection and empowerment of girls and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against them.

We welcome the themes of today's panel discussions on "women in decision-making" and "empowerment of women including through microfinance". The Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing in 1995, recognized the persistent inequality between men and women in decision-making and the inequalities faced by women in relation to economic resources among the twelve critical areas of concern, and outlined concrete actions to ensure women's equal access to and participation in decision-making and leadership, including in the economy.

During its fiftieth session in 2006, the Commission on the Status of Women, considered again the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes

as one of its priority themes. Discussions indicated that, while progress has been achieved since the Fourth World Conference on Women, serious obstacles to women's participation in decision-making at all levels persist. In its agreed conclusions, the Commission called on Governments to establish concrete goals, targets and benchmarks for achieving equal participation of women and men in decision-making bodies at all levels and in all areas. The Commission also called on Governments and relevant stakeholders to ensure women's access to micro-credit and microfinance schemes, as an effective means to empower women and create an enabling environment to facilitate their full and equal participation in the decision-making processes at all levels, particularly at the grass-roots level. In 2009, the Commission will have the opportunity to evaluate progress in the implementation of these agreed conclusions. The deliberations today in the context of this informal thematic debate will support that process.

Gender equality is recognized as a cross-cutting concern in all the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and should be addressed as an integral part of the work of all parts of the United Nations. Through its catalytic role in promoting and monitoring gender mainstreaming, the Commission is committed to continuing to play a significant part in integrating gender perspectives in the United Nations Development Agenda and the follow-up processes to global conferences and summits.

The informal thematic debate in the General Assembly provides a unique opportunity to share experiences, lessons learned and good practices in two critical areas. I hope the discussions will lead to concrete ideas on actions needed to ensure women's participation in decision-making at all levels as well as their economic empowerment.

Thank you.