

**Fifty-fifth session of the
Commission on the Status of Women**

**Remarks by
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**28 February 2011
United Nations Headquarters, New York**

Honorable Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased and deeply honored to address the 55th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. This is a historical moment as the world marks the memorable occasion of the launch of UN Women. I bring to you greetings from Dr Joan Clos the newly appointed UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT).

It is fitting to consider education, science and technology together in one session as these are critical and interdependent pillars of development. Education is the bedrock for the advancement of humanity and in an ideal world every human being should have access to quality education. Regrettably, even where governments have adopted measures to ensure universal primary and secondary education, not all girls are in school both in the rural and urban areas.

The world is undergoing an information and technological revolution, and great strides have been recorded in science. More people are living longer as a result of advances in medicine. The internet and mobile phones are changing the way we connect and do business across the globe. Suffice to note that many of these scientific and technological changes are hatched and nurtured in cities around the world.

The information and technology edge has presented opportunities for young people, girls and boys, but so are the challenges, as identified in the Plan International *State of the World's Girls Report 2010 - Because I am a Girl - Digital and Urban Frontiers - Girls in a Changing Landscape*.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many young women and men are on the move from the rural to urban areas, or from one country to another in the hope of benefitting from the urban advantage – better infrastructure and basic services – schools, health facilities, high speed information technologies, better transport, energy and housing, employment opportunities and decent work. However, many find themselves settling in inner cities, slums and informal settlements which lack basic services and infrastructure.

In some slums, the schools are overcrowded with few teachers and not enough scholastic materials and basic facilities. A UN-HABITAT study in 17 African cities established that many slum schools had unisex toilets, and this contributed to the school drop-out rate for girls, especially those at puberty. Other factors, affecting girls' education in cities include safety and security in public spaces, especially on public transport as girls travel to school.

It is estimated that there are over 100 million street children globally, and that 30 per cent of these children are girls who have to endure the harsh living conditions and temptations of street life. While boys can get involved in crime, some street girls use their bodies to survive by selling sex.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need a multi-pronged approach in responding to gender issues in education, science and technology. Our efforts should permeate Schools of Science and Engineering and centers of technological innovation. We should also establish special measures to increase the number of girls in education in general, and in science and technology in particular.

My direct message and appeal to the Commission on the Status of Women and to UN Women is to pay greater attention to the impact of rapid urbanization and urban poverty in developing countries on gender equality and the empowerment of women. It is imperative that we respond to the current demographic shifts and address the plight of poor urban women and the most vulnerable in cities and towns – the homeless and street children, migrant women and the disabled, women working in the informal sector including street vendors, and slum dwellers.

I would like to urge distinguished delegates to the Commission on the Status of Women to consider both urban and rural women and to think creatively about how UN-Women can develop an urban dimension to its thematic priority areas. Specifically, I would like to encourage further thinking about women's equal access to land and property as a strategy for economic empowerment; urban safety as a strategy for women, peace and security; and ending violence against women by planning cities with women in mind including the systems of land use and urban design that prevent violence which occur in public spaces. Further, I would encourage ways to incorporate gender budgeting practices and related urban management strategies in the thematic area of women's leadership and political participation. By targeting cities and local authorities, UN-Women can ensure that their efforts to prevent violence against women and empower women are viable and real at the local level, closest to the people.

It is my firm belief that in the not-so-distant future, Commission on the Status of Women will dedicate a session to women in cities, with emphasis on women living in slums and informal settlements.

Thank you.