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Agenda Item 3A

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Chair, Ministers, fellow delegates,

After three days and dozens of speeches, statements and side-events – one message is crystal clear:

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are preconditions for sustainable development and should be at the heart of policy making.

As we prepare to go to Rio in June, we shall remember that women all over the world will scrutinize every move we make – and how we perform there!

Rural women, not least the poor in developing countries, are the first to suffer from *economic* stagnation, *social* injustice and *environmental* degradation!

This is not only a *disgrace* and a violation of these women's human rights, depriving them of freedom, time and opportunity to fully participate in economic and political life.

Rural women's lack of access to natural resources, basic services and productive assets is also a *destructive* barrier to economic growth and sustainable development – at the local, national and global level.

20 years after the Earth Summit in Rio and 17 years after the Women's Conference in Beijing, we know very well *what needs to be done*.

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I will highlight three points:

First of all, we need to promote and protect all human rights of women, including their right to the highest attainable standard of health. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are particularly important.

We know as a fact that millions of women, especially poor women in rural areas of many countries, don't have the freedom to control their own reproduction, nor do they have access to basic reproductive health services.

As a consequence 13 percent of all mothers who die, die because of unsafe abortions. We also know that practically all unsafe abortions take place in countries where abortion is illegal.

Beyond these lethal facts, we also know that too early pregnancies and child birth are important obstacles to millions of women's access to education and employment, economic and political freedom.

This brings me to my point number two:

We must take pro-active measures to enable women to participate fully in economic life. This will include ensuring their equal rights to economic resources - including credit, land, water, energy, technology and decent work.

Such pro-active measures will require legislation, laws and regulation – and enforcement. In some cases this may require affirmative action, including subsidies and quotas.

Which brings me to my third point:

Many countries need to take affirmative action to ensure women's rights to participate fully in political life and decision-making – at the local, national, regional and global levels. This is particularly relevant in all the countries in political transition.

Women's rights should be enshrined in constitutions and ensured by legislation and enforcement.

Chair, fellow delegates,

Since we know all this, and have known for decades – why doesn't happen?
I regret to say this, but I believe we all know the answer to this question as well:

Doing the right thing – for women and for the planet – would require a change of mind-set and a willingness to change priorities – among the rich and powerful, the elites, around the world.

And as we know, the rich and powerful – the decision-makers around the world are mostly men, in particular middle aged men.



This brings me to my final point:

It is crucial for our success that we actively reach out and mobilize men and boys for gender equality and women's empowerment.

So I chose to close my remarks by this direct appeal to men and boys around the world:

Stop promoting the short-term self interest, begin promoting the long-term collective good.
Your first test will be in Rio in four months!

Thank you.

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