

56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
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Closing remarks
15 March 2012

Madame Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues and friends,

During this fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we have witnessed passionate and dynamic discussion with a very high level of participation from governments and civil society.

Unfortunately we have also witnessed an inability to reach consensus on the agreed conclusions on our priority theme, empowering rural women. We have come to an impasse, which is deeply regrettable.

This situation is unfortunate and I would like to express disappointment, disappointment that is shared by many women around the world, especially rural women and girls to whom this session was dedicated.

It means a failure to adopt agreed conclusions after two weeks full of energy and commitment of so many official delegations, with many headed by ministers and senior government officials. The 2,084 representatives from 435 civil society organizations brought forth the voices and perceptions of women and their contribution was invaluable.

There were more than 70 side events on the United Nations premises, and more than 300 side events outside of the United Nations. The session was impressive not only in terms of numbers and participation.

These two weeks gave us hope that stakeholders were ready to provide both priority attention and much needed resources to further women's empowerment and gender equality in all its dimensions, including sexual and reproductive health, and access to technology, and other important areas.

During these past two weeks, we have heard many innovations and good practice examples. Fresh and creative ideas were presented about what works and how national policy, legal reforms, programmes and services are contributing to concrete, positive changes in the lives of women and girls, and men and boys.

I sincerely hope that the failure to adopt agreed conclusions does not mean that Member States will not do what needs to be done to improve rural women's and girls' lives in all dimensions and ensure their rights.

UN-Women stands ready, together with our partners in the United Nations system, to empower rural women, to provide strong and coherent support to turn the commitments that delegations have mentioned in this session that remain despite the lack of agreement, into tangible results for women on the ground.

Just a few days ago, I was in Morocco where we commemorated International Women's Day together. While I was there I had the honour to meet the Soualalyate women, rural women who claimed their right to communal lands. They gave meaning to leadership and showed how empowering women in a community benefits the community as a whole.

I remain more convinced than ever that the voices of women must be heard in decision-making at all levels if we want to achieve lasting peace, democracy and sustainable development.

Because we recognize the imperative of empowering rural women, UN-Women and the United Nations Rome-based agencies—the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the World Food Programme—are developing a comprehensive response in support of rural women's and girls' economic empowerment. We will provide support to scale up successful initiatives, and strengthen partnerships with local partners in a number of countries.

Because we recognize that good development models are based on evidence and mutual accountability, UN-Women has launched a dynamic new partnership, the Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) Initiative. This is designed to meet the rising demand by countries for greater support in collecting and using sex-disaggregated statistics, and strengthening

national capacity and national systems on data collection to advance women's empowerment and gender equality.

Madame Chair,
Distinguished participants,

This session of the Commission on the Status of Women confirmed once again that the empowerment of women cannot be pursued in isolation from current global, regional and national realities. Indeed, economic, political, cultural and social realities provide the context for achieving gender equality as a societal responsibility. The current state of affairs—marked by rising mistrust and frustration with governments and institutions, economic instability, high unemployment, and climate change, actually provides us with a valid argument. We can no longer afford to leave women out.

No solution to today's most pressing challenges can be found without the full and equal participation of women. We cannot achieve democracy, sustainable development and lasting peace unless women obtain the same opportunities as men to influence developments at all levels of society.

The time is now to remove the barriers and discrimination that hold women back from reaching their potential. If we want to end hunger and poverty, then we need to open fiscal and policy space to respond to the rights, needs and priorities of rural women and women farmers. If we want to walk on a path of sustainable development, then we need to open opportunities to ensure that women's rights and empowerment are pursued as a priority. Times of social upheaval and political transformation present opportunities for the full and equal participation of women in decision-making to strengthen democracy and justice for all.

As we look ahead, there is no shortage of work to be done. And I would like to express the hope to move forward in a spirit of safeguarding the consensus that has been reached in international agreements over many years regarding women's rights, as articulated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and other agreements.

Madame Chair,

The focus next year of this Commission will be the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. There can be no peace that is lasting and no development that is sustainable until we end violence against women and girls. The initial discussion that took place during this session, on issues that should be covered next year, was very productive. Now we need to look at the important measures that have been taken over many years, and make a critical analysis of what needs to be done so that we can bring about truly irreversible improvements and action to match the scale and scope of the problem. I urge all stakeholders to take full advantage of the months ahead to gather the evidence, good practices and successful examples for a productive and ground-breaking session in 2013. I would like to assure you that UN-Women is committed to working with all of you on preparing very well for next year's session.

In closing, I would like to thank all individuals who participated in this session of the Commission on the Status of Women and especially you, Madame Chair, and the members of the Bureau – Ambassador Carlos Garcia, Ms. Ana Maria Hernando, Ms. Irina Velichko and Mr. Filippo Cinti – for the efforts done to reach agreement. Madame Chair, we look forward to supporting you as your guide us towards March 2013.

Thank you.