

**Fifty-ninth Session of the General Assembly  
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**Introductory Statement**

by

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Mr. Chairperson,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and privilege for me to address the Third Committee on Item 98: Advancement of women, and Item 99: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chairperson, on your election as chair of this Committee and convey my congratulations to the other members of the Bureau.

I am happy to inform the Committee that the recently appointed Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Ms. Rachel Mayanja, will take up her position in mid-November.

I am certain that this Committee has been heartened by the news that during the past week two women were awarded Nobel prizes. Ms. Wangari Maathai, Assistant Minister for the Environment in Kenya, was awarded the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for her contribution to women's human rights, sustainable development and peace over more than two decades. She has taken a holistic approach to sustainable development and in her work highlighted the integral links between human rights, democracy and peace. Ms Maathai is the 12<sup>th</sup> woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. The Austrian novelist and playwright, Ms. Elfriede Jelinek, was awarded the 2004 Nobel Prize for Literature. Her works have denounced sexual violence. Ms. Jelinek was the 10<sup>th</sup> women to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. We convey our congratulations to these two outstanding women. Their awards are an illustration of the important leadership roles women play in the world today and offer inspiration as we move forward in preparations for ten-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2005.

Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished delegates,

In his opening statement to the General Assembly, the Secretary-General focused on the rule of law as the all-important framework for decision-making at national and international level. He reminded us that rule of law means first and foremost that no one

is above the law and no one should be denied its protection. He also emphasized that rule of law as a concept is not enough: “laws must be put into practice and permeate the fabric of our lives”.

Those who champion equality for women rely to a large extent on the power of the law, and the protection which it can offer, to overcome discrimination and disadvantage. The appointment by the Secretary-General of Ms. Louise Arbour of Canada as the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Ms. Mehr Khan Williams of Pakistan as her Deputy, as been welcomed as important for the promotion of the human rights of women.

The year 2004 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption, by the General Assembly of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. 178 States are now party to, and thus obligated to translate into practice, this international human rights treaty, which is of paramount significance to the practical realization of the principle of equality of women and men. Adherence to the Convention, and its implementation in practice, contributes significantly to enhance the rule of law and fosters a climate where violations of the rights of women will not be tolerated, nationally and internationally.

The commemoration of the anniversary tomorrow afternoon, with the participation of officials at the highest level, provides an opportunity for all those who are committed to the protection and promotion of the human rights of women – experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, representatives of Government, civil society and the UN system – to examine how the Convention has been used as the legal basis and as a powerful instrument for furthering the rights of women, and to strategize about ways to accelerate the momentum for full realization of women’s human rights.

The Third Committee has before it the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Committee’s Chairperson, Ms. Feride Acar, will present the report. Let me emphasize the essential contribution the Committee makes to the protection and promotion of the human rights of women through its monitoring role, as well as in considering complaints and conducting inquiries under the Optional Protocol. The Committee is submitting a request for extension of its meeting time to this session of the General Assembly so as to enable it to discharge all its responsibilities under these two instruments in a timely and effective manner – I urge Member States to give careful consideration to this request of the Committee.

The Third Committee regularly focuses on the elimination of violence against women in an effort to enhance the protective and preventive work that is done at national level and internationally. This year, the Committee will consider the question of trafficking in women, and elimination of all forms of violence against women, including crimes committed against women in the name of honour (A/59/185 and A/59/281). Violence against women, including trafficking, is now widely recognized as a matter of serious public concern, with implications not only for women victims of violence but also

for society as a whole. Governments continued to refine legislative frameworks that aim at prevention of such acts, as well as punishment of perpetrators. Violence against women, including trafficking, can however not be tackled effectively through legislation alone. A comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach is necessary which also includes policy and programme measures, support for victims, awareness raising and capacity building efforts to strengthen prevention and protection components, and measures to ensure redress for victims and punishment of perpetrators.

The report (A/59/281) also provides a brief update on the preparation of the study of the Secretary-General on the elimination of all forms of violence against women, mandated last year for presentation to the sixtieth session of the General Assembly. We are very grateful to the Governments of France and the Netherlands for financial contributions which allow the preparation of the study to move forward. Significant work has been done in recent years by Governments, NGOs, activists and researchers, and the United Nations system to document violence against women, and to develop responses to prevent violence from occurring, to prosecute and punish perpetrators, and to provide remedies and relief to victims. The information gathered in recent years for reports of the Secretary-General on various aspects of violence against women as well as the information contained in the responses to the questionnaire for the 10-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action provides a significant source of good practices and examples of Member States' action in this area. We intend to fully harness this knowledge, experience and expertise in the hope that the study would not only synthesize the existing status, but also clearly point to gaps and challenges, and opportunities for further action.

In conducting the study, the Division will convene a number of expert meetings on particular topics, such as the question of available statistics, data collection and methodological concerns, and will commission background papers to synthesize existing information on achievements and challenges in tackling violence against women in all parts of the world. We will seek further inputs from Governments, specifically on good practices and lessons learned. Similarly, NGOs and entities of the United Nations system will have opportunity to contribute to the preparation of the study.

Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished delegates,

The review and appraisal in the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women will mark ten years of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975. The focus of the review and appraisal will be implementation at national level through high-level interactive dialogue and exchange of good practices. A number of high-level roundtables and panels will be organized on important themes for national level implementation to identify and address achievements, gaps and remaining challenges.

In July of this year, ECOSOC decided that the Commission should convene a high-level plenary meeting that would include participation of all United Nations

Member States and Observers (E/2004/309). The Chairperson will transmit the outcome of the session, through ECOSOC, to the 60<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly, including to the high-level event of the General Assembly on the review of the Millennium Declaration. ECOSOC also adopted a resolution that decided, on an exceptional basis, to invite those non-governmental organizations accredited to the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000 to attend the 49<sup>th</sup> session of CSW (E/2004/57).

A Secretary-General's report on implementation will be prepared on the basis of responses to a questionnaire as well as other information submitted by Member States. To date a total of 123 responses have been received by the Secretariat. A Secretary-General's report will also be prepared on the support to implementation provided by the United Nations system.

Regional review and appraisal processes are being organized by the United Nations regional commissions. Three regional meetings have already been held – in Mexico City from 10-12 June 2004; in Beirut from 8-9 July 2004; and in Bangkok from 7-10 September 2004. A meeting is being held this week in Addis Ababa from 10-15 October 2004 and the final regional meeting will be held in Geneva from 14-15 December 2004. Regional reports will be prepared on the basis of the responses to the questionnaires submitted by Member States as a contribution to the review and appraisal in the Commission on the Status of Women.

The active participation of non-governmental organizations, at all levels, national, regional and international, will be critical for the successful preparations for and implementation of the review and appraisal process.

The outcome of the review and appraisal process in the Commission on the Status of Women will contribute to the high-level event to be held in 2005 to review progress in achieving the Millennium Declaration, renew commitment and define further action required in the pursuit of the goals set in the Millennium Summit in 2000. The Millennium Declaration highlighted that gender equality and the empowerment of women is an essential precondition for the eradication of poverty and hunger and the achievement of sustainable development. Without explicit efforts to address the gender perspectives of all Millennium Development Goals, efforts to achieve these goals will be constrained.

The Millennium Development Goals should be seen as an instrument to support the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. It needs to be kept in mind that, despite significant efforts, few measureable targets were established in the Platform for Action and the outcome of its review and appraisal. Working in the context of the Millennium Development Goals, with globally endorsed targets and indicators, does, therefore, represent an important opportunity for increasing the focus on national level implementation and measuring progress and outcomes.

Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished delegates,

The review and appraisal is currently under preparation and it is not possible to provide a conclusive overview at this stage. Some preliminary findings emerging from the analysis carried out so far indicate, however, that while progress has been made in some areas, many of the challenges and obstacles identified in 1995 still remain. There have, for example, been significant advances for women in many parts of the world in relation to health, education and employment. However, even where progress have been made there is still much room for improvement. The persistent, and in some cases increasing, incidence of violence against women, the under-representation of women in decision-making in all areas and at all levels, the persistence of discriminatory laws governing marriage, land, property and inheritance, the lack of access of many women to basic reproductive health services, and the fact that women continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, is unacceptable. In addition, the new challenges for women's empowerment and gender equality that have emerged over the past decade, such as HIV/AIDS, trafficking and ICT, need to be more effectively addressed. There were more women than men among an estimated 4.8 million who became newly infected with HIV/AIDS in 2003. These findings coincide with the trends observed in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, as described in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, document A/59/282.

A major challenge is the low level of political participation of women. The Inter-Parliamentary Union statistics indicate that today, the proportion of seats held by women in legislative bodies stands at 15.4 per cent. This figure continues a trend of gradual but sustained growth for women, from 13.1 per cent in 2000 and 14.3 per cent 2002. Despite the progress, only 14 countries have at least 30 per cent representation of women in parliament - the benchmark set in the Beijing Platform for Action (paragraph 182).

Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished delegates,

Over the past year, the 2004 substantive session of ECOSOC and the forty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women adopted a number of critical decisions that strengthened commitment and further outlined the actions needed for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

The agreed conclusions (E/2004/27 - E/CN.6/2004/14) adopted by the Commission on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality identified men's crucial role in sharing family responsibilities, including caring for dependents; and in preventing violence against women, including trafficking, and HIV/AIDS transmission. Recommendations were directed towards, inter alia, enabling men's involvement in efforts towards gender equality, including by building capacity and raising awareness on gender equality and the advancement of women, providing positive role models for younger men and boys, and generating socio-cultural change towards gender equality, including through the educational process. Enhancing the role of men and boys in

promotion of gender equality will be critical to ensuring full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session.

The Commission also considered the thematic issue of women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building. In its agreed conclusions (E/2004/27 – E/CN.6/2004/14.), the Commission made a number of important recommendations on the participation of women and incorporation of gender perspectives in conflict prevention, peace processes, and post-conflict peace-building, including in elections and reconstruction and rehabilitation. The Commission called for, *inter alia*, improved collection of information, better collaboration and coordination, and increased attention to capacity-building.

Three expert group meetings organized in preparation for the forty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women have led to development of concrete instruments to support implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Commission. In November 2003 the Division for the Advancement of Women (DESA/DAW), in collaboration with the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), organized an expert group meeting on "Peace agreements as a means for promoting gender equality and ensuring participation of women – A framework of model provisions", generously hosted by the Government of Canada. The model provisions for peace agreements provide an important framework for increasing attention to gender perspectives in peace agreements and have been disseminated broadly by DPA and other actors. In January 2004, OSAGI in collaboration with DPA organized an expert group meeting on "Enhancing women's participation in electoral processes in post conflict situations". A set of briefing notes have been developed to facilitate integration of gender perspectives into electoral processes. The expert group meeting on "The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality", generously hosted by the Government of Brazil in October 2003, made an important contribution to the preparation of the 48th session of the Commission on the Status of Women as well as to the global debate on this important topic. The expert papers are being published by the Division for the Advancement of Women.

The 2004 substantive session of ECOSOC reviewed the system-wide implementation of agreed conclusions 1997/2 on gender mainstreaming. Considerable efforts have been undertaken to implement gender mainstreaming across the United Nations system, and significant achievements have been made - for example in the area of development of specific policies and strategies on gender equality, capacity-building and development of methodologies and tools and inter-agency collaboration, in particular through the Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality. The gap between policy and practice remains, however, a major constraint. Full implementation of gender mainstreaming requires further efforts to integrate gender perspectives into other policies and strategies in different sector areas, into all capacity building programmes, into methodology development initiatives in all areas, and into different forms of inter-agency collaboration, including thematic groups at country level.

In resolution 2004/4 adopted by the Council, it was reaffirmed that gender mainstreaming remains a major strategy for the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, as a complement to strategies for women's empowerment, and that the ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2 remain a valid framework for promoting and monitoring the implementation of gender mainstreaming throughout the United Nations system. The Council requested, inter alia, the Secretary-General to ensure that all United Nations entities develop action plans with time lines for implementing the agreed conclusions 1997/2, which address the gap between policy and practice, with a view to strengthening commitment and accountability at the highest levels. The Council decided to undertake a further review and appraisal of the implementation of its agreed conclusions 1997/2 at a future session before 2010.

In resolution 2004/4, the General Assembly was recommended to encourage its committees and other intergovernmental bodies to take further measures to integrate systematically gender perspectives into all areas of their work, including the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of major United Nations summits and conferences, and in particular the 2005 high-level event planned in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 58/291 of 6 May 2004.

The Committee has before it the report of the Secretary-General on Measures taken and progress achieved in follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/59/214). The report focuses on the attention given to gender equality issues in the outcome of major events during the past year, namely the World Summit on the Information Society and the Eleventh session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, as well as in the implementation of and follow-up to major international conferences and summits, including the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals. It also covers steps taken by the Assembly and its main committees during its fifty-eight session to promote the achievement of the goal of gender equality through the gender mainstreaming strategy, as reflected in resolutions. To assess the extent to which documentation before the Assembly facilitates gender-sensitive policy formulation, the report also reviews reports of the Secretary-General. The recommendations focus on, inter alia, the need to enhance the analysis of gender perspectives and the recommendations for further action in reports submitted to the Assembly and its subsidiary bodies; increase follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations made in the resolutions; and mainstream gender perspectives into the implementation of and follow-up to major international conferences and summits, in particular in the context of the review of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration in 2005.

Mr Chairperson, Distinguished delegates,

In May 2004, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples held its third session devoted to the theme on Indigenous women (E/2004/43). The Forum pointed out that indigenous women, numbering more than 150 million throughout the world, have been

often invisible to human rights, humanitarian and development institutions and face social dislocation due to conflicts, poverty and underdevelopment, lack of access to public resources and marginalization due to their cultural and minority status. The Permanent Forum adopted a large body of recommendations on indigenous women focusing on mainstreaming indigenous women's issues throughout the United Nations system to, inter alia, ensure their access to decision making and resources, enhanced participation in development processes, and access to support programmes addressing violence against indigenous women and children and the development of specific policies to eliminate multiple grounds of racism and gender discrimination of against indigenous women.

The 2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women, further to General Assembly resolutions 54/210 (1999) and 58/206 (2003), will be presented to the Second Committee under Agenda Item: 89 Eradication of poverty and other development issues (b) Women in development. The *World Survey* addresses key issues related to women and international migration and highlights the importance of understanding the gender perspectives on both the causes and consequences of international migration. The *World Survey* proposes a number of recommendations to empower migrant women, as well as refugee, displaced and trafficked women and girls, and promote and protect their rights, including, inter alia, through ratification and implementation of international legal instruments; review of national laws and policies; development of policies and programmes which enhance opportunities and access to services.

A report by the Secretary-General on four years of implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security will be presented to the Security Council at the end of this month. Notwithstanding the progress made in advocacy, norm-setting and institutional capacity building, significant gaps remain in the achievement of the recommendations in resolution 1325 on increased participation of women in conflict prevention and peace processes; integration of gender perspectives in peace agreements; attention to the contributions and needs of women in humanitarian and reconstruction processes; and representation of women in decision-making positions.

A major challenge is the protection of women and girls in armed conflict. Sustained commitment and effort is required to stop gender-based violence and other human rights violations, end impunity and bring perpetrators to justice. The forthcoming open debate of the Security Council on 28 October 2004, under the Presidency of the United Kingdom, will have a strong focus on gender based violence in conflict situations.

Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished delegates,

The Committee will consider the status of women in the United Nations system. The representation of women in the Professional and higher categories has increased from 35 to 36.4 per cent, as of 31 December 2003. In the United Nations Secretariat, over the last twelve months the proportion of women in professional and higher level

categories on appointments of a year or more increased by 1.7 per cent to 37.4 per cent, the most significant progress made since 1998. At senior and higher-level posts, women now make up 29 per cent of staff. At the D-1 level and above, women constitute 22.3 per cent. For the more restricted category of posts subject to geographical distribution, women account for 42.3 per cent of all Professional staff. At the P-4 and P-5 levels the representation of women has stagnated in the period 1998 to 2004, which is of great concern, given the significance of those levels as a pool for senior and higher posts.

As requested by the General Assembly, the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women conducted a study on the probable causes of the slow advance in the improvement of the status of women in the United Nations Secretariat. The study identified a number of areas where new approaches and measures are required, including recruitment and selection processes; accountability; working climate and culture; and informal barriers to gender balance. For example, to broaden the pool of women applicants, more proactive and targeted recruitment methods are necessary to attract the most qualified women candidates. Increased efforts are also needed to support mobility across departments and duty stations, to strengthen individual career planning, and to promote greater accountability of managers for selection decisions.

The Committee has before it the report of the Secretary-General on Future operations of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (A/59/313). The report provides information on the revitalization of the Institute, including the constitution of the Executive Board (mandated by ECOSOC resolution 2003/57) and the holding of its first session on 27 July 2004, as well as initiatives undertaken by the Institute to launch a redesigned website, strengthen cooperative arrangements with United Nations entities, expand its research programme and intensify its fund-raising campaign. The Director of the Institute will provide more details on the first session of the Executive Board and the ongoing work programme of the Institute.

Finally, Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished delegates,

The coming year offers a number of important opportunities for further advancing the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. As well as working to ensure the effective ten-year review and appraisal of implementation in the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, it will be critical to ensure that gender perspectives are an integral part of the major event on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and other important processes during 2005, including the review of the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development. The challenge for this Committee is to utilize these opportunities to ensure that gender perspectives are fully incorporated in all work of the General Assembly.

This Committee has an important role to play in ensuring the political will, concerted action and accountability required of the international community. I pledge the

support of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women for your efforts. I wish you a successful outcome of the session.

Thank you.