

Panel on Gender Mainstreaming in the Functional Commissions of ECOSOC

Opening Statement

by

Ms. Angela E.V. King

Assistant secretary-general

Special adviser on gender Issues and advancement of women

Mme. Vice-President,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and Friends,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to today's panel discussion.

Gender mainstreaming was established as a major global strategy for the promotion of gender equality in the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995. In 1997, the Council took a critical step in translating this commitment from the Fourth World Conference on Women into practice. In adopting its agreed conclusions 1997/2, the Council emphasized its desire to promote a coordinated and coherent policy of gender mainstreaming. To that end, the Council clarified the concept of mainstreaming and the central principles associated with it. Perhaps most importantly, the Council addressed specific recommendations to all actors within the United Nations system. It gave direction to the intergovernmental processes, and also spelled out the institutional requirements for gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes.

I would like to comment briefly on the institutional requirements and some of the steps taken by the entities of the United Nations system to implement the Council's recommendations.

The Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE), which I have the honour of chairing on behalf of the United Nations, remains the most effective catalyst for enhancing system-wide capacity for gender mainstreaming. And, perhaps just as important, it secures the necessary commitment and support for gender mainstreaming from the executive heads of the entities of the system. As in the past, with commitments of

executive heads in ACC, we now look forward to the support of the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and its two high-level committees as set out in its Annual Overview (E/2002/55). The Network, in turn, will continue its catalytic, advisory and policy-setting roles so that we can continue to make steady progress in reflecting gender perspectives in all policies and programmes.

The work of the Network is also testimony to the critical role of gender focal points and gender experts in support of gender mainstreaming. Gender experts in the entities of the UN system, including in the Departments and Offices of the Secretariat, support their programme colleagues to recognize, and respond, to the gender dimensions in their sector area of responsibility and expertise. I would, however, like to point out that gender mainstreaming is not the responsibility of gender advisers or gender units. Rather, their role is catalytic, while responsibility for attention to the gender dimensions in a particular area, for a particular type of function, rests with management at all levels. Management must ensure that all programme staff develop the capacity to identify and address effectively relevant gender perspectives in their areas of work.

Most recently, we have reported on steps taken by the entities of the UN system to the Commission on the Status of Women at its session in March (in document E/CN.6/2002/2). Following the Council's guidance in agreed conclusions 1997/2, specific policies and strategies aimed at achieving gender equality have been developed. These policies and strategies call for the incorporation of gender perspectives in substantive work, and outline the ways and means by which this will be achieved. Efforts also continue to incorporate gender perspectives into policy development in different sector areas and into work programmes in these areas.

Entities of the UN system use a variety of tools and support instruments to develop the necessary environment and capacity for operationalizing the gender mainstreaming strategy in policy research, advocacy, and in operational activities. While some entities have already succeeded in making gender perspectives an integral part of their work, others are still in the early stages of using such tools and implementing the strategy.

As we intensify our efforts we also recognize the continued need for strengthening our institutional capacity for gender mainstreaming, including through training and competence development, work on methodologies and tools, and development of capacity to monitor progress and ensure accountability. While the principles of gender mainstreaming are universally applicable, each sector has its particularities, and the approach must vary

depending on the mandate of each entity, whether the focus is on research and data collection, normative or policy work, advocacy, or operational activities for development. Information sharing and inter-agency activities are thus important parts of our collective effort to enhance capacity for gender mainstreaming.

Members of the Network continue to face challenges in ensuring the systematic implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy. They emphasize the importance of explicit commitment and support for gender mainstreaming from the highest level, in the form of institutional directives, strategies or action plans. Mechanisms for monitoring and accountability, as well as for measuring impact, are also seen as critical aspects for progress, as are training and competence development for all staff. The availability of relevant data, studies and information to facilitate gender-specific analysis, while increasing, is still not always sufficient.

Over the last two years, my Office has organized and implemented a competence development programme on gender mainstreaming for professional staff in at least the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and in a number of other Offices, including the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention in Vienna. We have also had the first regional programme for practitioners in Member States in the ESCAP region. I am therefore especially pleased that some of those with whom we were privileged to work are part of this ECOSOC panel on gender mainstreaming in the work of the functional commissions.

Let me reiterate the importance of collaboration and sharing of experiences in promoting gender mainstreaming. This morning's panel, and the Council's new sub-item, provide unique opportunities to do so.

I wish you all a fruitful discussion.

* * * * *