

**Statement
by
Ms. Rachel Mayanja
Assistant Secretary-General
Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women**

**In observance of International Women's Day
"Gender equality beyond 2005: Building a more secure future"**

New York, 8 March 2005

Mr. Moderator,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today is a special day for women and it heralds the start of a new awakening for all of us. This year, we celebrate International Women's Day as the beginning of a new challenging period – an era committed to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on Beijing+5. The Declaration adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women testifies to this renewed determination. Last week, we heard from so many of the distinguished women who were successful in achieving important goals – not least the placing of women at the head of the development agenda and at the heart of the commitment to achieve gender equality and a more secure future for all the peoples of the world but also to propose practical solutions and strategies for achieving these lofty goals.

Secure future for all the peoples has been on the United Nations agenda since its very inception and the concept is now acquiring a new meaning and new life.

The Oxford dictionary defines security as a secure condition or feeling; untroubled by danger or fear. Recent discussions on peace and security have now moved away from a purely military point of view to an understanding that human security which puts people – women and men – at the centre of the debate is the key to strengthen the security of all of us. The world is increasingly recognizing that the continuing political, economic and social marginalization of one-half of its population – women – will not bring about a secure future for all.

Today's development agenda essentially focuses on the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, and also is a major step towards a secure world.

MDGs

For the billion-plus women and men living in extreme poverty, the Millennium Development Goals represent the only hope to have a productive life. For the entire world they

are a linchpin to the quest for a more secure and peaceful world. During the past several days, members of delegations, UN entities and civil society have eloquently stated, that the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW should be the basis for the achievement of the MDGs. Our newest mantra is that all the MDGs are relevant to women, and women are relevant to the achievement of all MDGs.

As we begin to take stock of our progress towards the achievement of the MDGS, we are already aware that with regard to gender equality, there is a serious disconnect between commitments made at the international level and translation of commitment into policies and programmes at the national level that inevitably delays progress.

We need to look at the implementation processes and make the necessary changes in order to ensure a more systematic integration of women's perspectives and gender issues in the national planning and reporting mechanisms on the MDGs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Action is needed to make women an integral part of a global vision for economic justice and human rights; they must be included in decisions regarding economic policies, good governance and effective spending and of course, they must have more opportunities to participate on an equal basis in the economies and decision-making of their countries. This is our task in the months and years ahead.

Security

I now turn to the issue of security. The final report on the high-level panel on Threats, Challenges and Change has surprisingly very little to say in terms of gender perspectives. It deals with addressing the root causes that lead to instability and bad governance. It takes the view that democratic societies are least likely to suffer from many of the threats and challenges which lead to breakdown in peace and security. Yet, it fails to see the connection between the exclusion and marginalization of women from and in the political process as a factor in the democratic deficits which heighten the risks of internal violence and instability.

Security Council resolution 1325 has provided an important tool to bring women into the process of transforming potential conflicts into peaceful negotiations.

Women all over the world now have to engage strenuously in this debate and we must link it to respect for the rule of law and human rights, gender equality, dialogue and transparency. We have no choice, because unequal access to resources, authoritarian political systems and corruption increase instability and lead to conflict. Conflicts lead to wars and as we know, the most devastating and deadly effects of war impinge most heavily on women and children.

Natural Disasters

I think that it is appropriate for me to speak of the recent disaster in South East Asia. The tsunami was a powerful warning to the world of the power of nature and that the environment is

a precious commodity which we must nurture and respect. There is agreement that gender is an important factor in environmental issues and the warning from the tsunami has to be that women must now begin to take an informed and serious interest in these issues. Global warming, desertification, sea-level rise, pollution and other grave environmental problems now confront us and this is another challenge. Women are actors and should ensure that their voices are heard in all the debates on the environment.

But the tsunami demonstrated powerfully that we have an incredible ability to mobilize across all the boundaries in defense of others. It also demonstrated that there is a gender component in the impact of environmental disaster. There is evidence that the tsunami's effect was heavier on women than on men. It is believed that this was due to social and cultural norms that limited the mobility of women and made them focus on the well-being of their families at the expense of their own safety. Then there are the reports of incidents of sexual assaults in refugee camps, mirroring the treatment of women and girls in the aftermath of conflict.

This disaster has also illustrated that there is a role for women worldwide to keep reminding the international community that a combination of preventable diseases and conflict is causing a disaster of tsunami proportions in Africa every few months. Yet, there is a lack of the same level of international interest, support or solidarity.

Way forward to implement the Beijing Platform for Action

Our first task is to ensure that the review of the Millennium Declaration is based on the commitments to the Beijing Platform. We must also work to embed gender equality as an underlying principle of all the MDGs. We have to be alert; so that when issues of development and security are on the agenda of the General Assembly, the outcome of these discussions must be a reaffirmation that gender equality is an undeniable prerequisite for making this world a better and more secure place – for all of us, women, men and children.

The report on the review and appraisal of the Platform for Action exposed many gaps and challenges in its implementation. Resources – both human and financial – are needed to carry out the tasks to promote gender mainstreaming policies throughout all Government departments and in business communities in all their countries.

In closing, Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to encourage you to celebrate our achievements and to remember those who have gone before us who worked so hard to bring us to where we are today. But as the saying goes that women's work is never done; our work some ways is just beginning. I must warn you that the task ahead is not going to be any less difficult than it has been during the past decades.

This year, we will have an opportunity to reaffirm all our commitments to build a more secure future for all women and men. Poverty, armed conflict and violence cannot be seen in isolation. The eradication of poverty and disease is as important as dealing with criminal networks that traffic in women and children.

We cannot reassemble here at the end of another decade to lament that we have failed to achieve our goals. Let us leave here resolved to work even harder than we have in the past to turn our commitments into reality.

My heartfelt congratulations on International Women's Day and my wishes of happiness and success.

Thank you.
