

Opening remarks

by

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at the third session of the
Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality

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Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the third session of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality. I welcome our colleagues from other duty stations and those colleagues who are attending the session for the first time, Ms. Carmen Moreno, newly appointed Director of INSTRAW and Ms. Linda Wirth, Director of the Bureau for Gender Equality of ILO who has taken over from our long time colleague, Jane Zhang, and Ms. Ewa Zimny from ECE.

Mr. José Antonio Ocampo, the new Under-Secretary-General for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs sends his warm greetings. He had agreed to be with us this year, but unfortunately, was called away on mission. He is familiar with the work of the Network from his time as Executive Secretary of ECLAC and has commended it on several occasions.

As we embark on our meeting today, we see that we still face many a growing challenges. Violence against women persists in all countries and at all levels affecting the rights, well-being and the health of women. The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to devastate many societies reversing many development gains. Data show conclusively that infection rates are highest among women, and especially young women.

The threat to peace in war-torn countries continues to inhibit real advances in development. While some progress has been made in some areas, the situation remains fragile in many others. In these countries women have suffered greatly whether they are combatants or not. They also comprise the highest proportions of refugees and displaced persons.

These issues underscore the necessity to enlist women into leadership and decision-making positions where they still lag far behind. More men also need to be co-opted to champion gender equality. In the last decade the United Nations has made great advances in reaching agreement on key development issues through major international conferences and summits. It is now becoming more and more evident that implementation of the agreements

reached is needed in order to make progress. The Inter-Agency Network has a catalytic role to play in the implementation process, ensuring that a gender perspective is included in the preparation of and follow-up to international conferences and summits.

This is why we are very pleased to have with us Ms. Mari Simonen representing Ms. Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director, UNFPA who will speak to us on the preparations for the ten-year review and appraisal of the outcome of the International Conference on Population and Development and its five-year review in 1999. Later we shall hear of the developments towards the preparation for the ten-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Task Managers for their hard work and successful outcomes in the past year. Task Forces have been instrumental in bringing attention to gender concerns in important areas related to major UN conferences and summits such as financing for development and the information society. I would particularly like to commend the work of Ms. Hanne Laugesen and Ms. Patricia Faccin, leaders of the Task Force on Gender and ICTs who in a difficult atmosphere worked so diligently with likeminded agency representatives and NGOs to form the Gender Caucus. They have now both left ITU and we shall miss them. This Caucus, as you know, worked effectively to bring gender language into the final Declaration of Principles of the World Summit on the Information Society last December.

Three new task forces were established during the inter-sessional period – Gender and Water, Gender and Trade and Ten-Year Review of Beijing Platform for Action. Gender mainstreaming remains an effective strategy to achieve gender equality throughout the United Nations system and the Network has a central and continuing role to play in efforts to support managers to achieve viable gender mainstreaming. Significant progress has been made in gender mainstreaming in the UN system as shown in the very successful inter-agency panel during last July's ECOSOC in Geneva. But there is still much more to be done.

This year ECOSOC will review the implementation of its agreed conclusions 1997/2 on gender mainstreaming at its coordination segment. This review provides an opportunity for us to assess progress, challenges, gaps and constraints to gender mainstreaming throughout the UN system. A report on gender mainstreaming in the UN system will be prepared for the segment. Your feedback on the draft outline and format will be most welcome. I encourage you to update and provide information as input to the report for ECOSOC being prepared by DAW in collaboration with OSAGI. The Inter-Agency Workshop to be held all day Wednesday will focus on gender mainstreaming in programme reporting, monitoring and evaluation. The Workshop will provide a significant contribution to the ECOSOC review process. A manual for gender mainstreaming training based on the DESA experience will also be available.

The regional commissions continue to play their part in gender mainstreaming at the regional level. Both ESCWA and ECE have held very successful symposia on gender mainstreaming following on the earlier one in ESCAP in 1999. These symposia at which both Executive Secretaries, Ms. Mervat Tallawy and Ms. Brigita Schmögnerová played an active

part have been very useful in bringing together, the UN system, Member States and other practitioners in the two regions to clarify the gender mainstreaming concept, identifying methodologies for application, monitoring and measurement as well as identify the key priority areas for further work. The regions have also identified opportunities for mutual support through technical assistance and information sharing, for example, on gender budgeting. We look forward to seeing these reports and intend to track closely the impact of these symposia both in terms of spin-off benefits to Member States and to the regional commissions themselves. We look forward to working with ECA and ECLAC on the next symposia during the coming year.

I am also happy to inform you that we have also made considerable progress on women, peace and security issues. The third anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security was again marked by the Council last October. Speakers in the open debate lauded the achievements that had been made so far including the work of the IANWGE Task Force but also recognized that much more work was needed to fully implement this resolution. For the first time a Senior Gender Adviser, Ms. Amy Smythe of the Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed the Council.

Mobilization of women in the peace process, and their involvement in electoral processes have been the subject of two Expert Group Meetings organized by the DESA/DAW/OSAGI and DPA. The recommendations of these EGMs will serve as inputs to the Commission on the Status of Women and will consider the issue of women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace building.

At this session, we begin the process toward the ten-year review of the Beijing Conference. There is no official UN conference for the review but the issue will be taken up in the Commission on the Status of Women in 2005 and in other for a such as ECOSOC and the General Assembly part of its multi-year programme of work.

It will be a challenging process, especially given existing scarce resources. Therefore everyone's active participation is needed to ensure success and a continued commitment to the goals of Beijing and Beijing+5. It is important to strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and to identify necessary indicators to measure outcomes. This will be the subject of the High-Level Ministerial Round Table. I look forward to our substantive discussion on this topic. Two flagship publications, the World's Women: Trends and Statistics 2005 and the World Survey on Women in Development dealing with international migration will also be critical elements for the Beijing review.

Only two years ago, we took up the Millennium Development Goals as an item on our agenda. The relationship between gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals is obvious. We must therefore continue to advocate the need to take gender equality into account in policies and programmes to ensure that development is effective, to safeguard women's human rights, and to improve the living standards of both women and men.

Gender balance is still a major concern and challenge in the UN system. Efforts have been made to reach the 50/50 target but it remains elusive. We have to continue to implement and review our human resources policies. The study, mandated by General Assembly 57/180, on the probable causes of the slow advance in the improvement of the status of women in the UN system, which my office is undertaking, should provide us with some insight into the problem and will offer recommendations to achieve the target. At this session, we will hear from Ms. Beverley Young, Chief of Personnel Policies in ICSC on recent developments in human resources management policies across the common system. Our discussions on this topic last year were reviewed by the High-Level Committee on Management and appropriate action taken.

Another forthcoming highlight is International Women's Day, 8 March 2004 remains a major annual focus for the Secretary-General and for the system and the theme proposed by our Network for this year's observance is, "Women and HIV/AIDS". The focus will be on the gender dimensions of the pandemic. The event will be opened by the Secretary-General, and is sponsored by the Network and organized by OSAGI and DPI. Speakers were proposed by members of the Network Task Force. Much useful material and data on the topic has been collected and will be distributed. We hope that you will attend.

In closing, let me say that I am very appreciative to all of you for your collaboration, continued enthusiasm and hard work in making contributions to our collective responsibilities of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. The outcome of our deliberations will be an input to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women through my opening statement. Your support in making targetted decisions and recommendations for action by the High-Level Committees on Management and on Programmes of the CEB, are also encouraged.

Your dedication to our common objective of gender equality has had a ripple effect on a broad spectrum of actors from UN policy-makers throughout the system to women and men at grassroots level. Our collaboration and sharing is regarded as a model by many in the UN system. For the first time we have issued a Newsletter thanks to our new DESA/OSAGI Principal Officer for Gender Mainstreaming, Ms. Wariara Mbugua, who was a Network member from UNFPA. We welcome your feedback. Our Secretary, Ms. Aliye Celik and her team are back with us this year to support our work together with members of my Office, Ms. Sharon Taylor, Assistant Secretary and staff of DAW.

We have a full agenda ahead of us. Your input on emerging issues and trends is especially important for the CSW and the work of the Working Groups is key in mapping our next steps particularly in view of Millennium Declaration Conference and the review and appraisal of Beijing and Copenhagen next year, 2005. I look forward to a very productive and successful meeting.
