

Statement
by
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at the
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Ms. Najwa Nasai, representing First Lady,
Ms. Sima Bahatha, Assistant Secretary-General of League of Arab States,
H.E. Mr. Bader Omar AlDafa, Executive Secretary, ESCWA,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

I am honoured to address the Fourth Session of the Committee on Women and to participate in this important regional review of fifteen years of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. I am greatly encouraged by the opening statements of [ADD NAMES] which give evidence of strong continued regional commitment to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women. I also congratulate the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on the successful organization of both the Expert Group Meeting earlier this week and this important meeting.

It is almost 35 years since the First World Conference on Women and the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), which set the stage for a new era in global, regional and national efforts to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. The overall vision of “equality – development – peace” established at that Conference 35 years ago continues to guide us today. The momentum generated in the following World Conferences on Women in Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985 culminated in the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Beijing in 1995, which remains the global policy framework at global, regional and national levels. The issues raised in the Platform for Action – in particular the 12 critical areas of concern – remain extremely relevant today.

Since the Fourth World Conference in Beijing in 1995, we have reviewed progress in achieving the goals set at five yearly intervals – in 2000, in 2005 and now in 2010. This review process provides us with a unique opportunity to highlight and celebrate achievements, as well as to identify gaps and challenges and exchange information on the actions required to best address them in order to move forward towards achievement of the goals of gender equality and empowerment of women. In this review process, as in the previous processes, regional reviews such as this one are being carried out to contribute to the global review which will be held in the Commission on

the Status of Women in New York from 1-12 March 2010. At its session in March 2009, the Commission decided that the review should emphasize the sharing of experiences and good practices, with a view to overcoming remaining obstacles and new challenges, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals

[Further information on the fifteen-year review is available in a briefing note at the back of the room.]

This fifteen-year review process will be particularly significant for a number of reasons. While the Commission on the Status of Women is meeting from 1-12 March, the General Assembly will also hold a meeting to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The outcome of the review in the Commission on the Status of Women will feed into the 2010 Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council which will focus on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. And the outcome of the Commission – particularly through its focus on the linkages between the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals - will also provide an important contribution to the high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals to be held in the General Assembly in September 2010. In addition, we should keep in mind that the Security Council will commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 in October 2010.

In the Declaration adopted at the ten-year review in 2005, Member States called for further action to ensure the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Since 2005, there have been positive developments in a number of critical areas. While significant gaps and challenges also remain in these areas, it is important to acknowledge the achievements made.

Violence against women continues in all countries at all stages of development as an extreme manifestation of pervasive discrimination against women and girls. It threatens the rights and well-being of women rich and poor. Deeply concerned about this scourge, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in October 2006, launched his in-depth study on violence against women. Subsequent strong General Assembly resolutions on intensification of efforts to eradicate violence against women have led to increased action at global, regional and national levels. The Secretary-General's database on violence against women, requested by the General Assembly, is now established. The database, which is the first global "one-stop site" on measures taken by Member States to combat violence, will contain information on the extent, nature and consequences of all forms of violence against women, and on the impact and effectiveness of policies and programmes for combating such violence. Although the database was only launched in March 2009, information has already been provided by 81 countries and entered into the database. An inventory of a wide range of activities by United Nations entities is updated regularly and the Interagency Taskforce on Violence against Women continues its work in ten pilot countries to develop coordinated and coherent approaches to supporting the efforts of Member States to combat violence.

Highlighting his continued commitment to the issue, the Secretary-General launched his campaign “Unite to end violence against women”, at the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2008. The campaign provides an umbrella for efforts to address this scourge at global, regional and national levels and it has engaged a broad range of stakeholders – including Member States, United Nations entities, international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and other civil society organizations such as the private sector and the media. The Campaign focuses on three areas, namely: global advocacy, strengthened efforts and partnerships at national and regional levels, and United Nations leadership by example.

With respect to women, peace and security, follow-up to Security Council resolution 1325 has been significantly strengthened in recent years with the development of national plans for implementation by an increasing number of Member States. The adoption by the Security Council of three new resolutions, in particular 1820 (2008) and 1888 (2009) on sexual violence in armed conflict, and 1889 (2009) are important milestones and indications of continuing commitment to the cause. With these new resolutions, the Security Council signaled its resolve to intensify actions to ensure that violence against women during armed conflict is eliminated. Concerted efforts are now needed to ensure full implementation of these resolutions to bring about real change on the ground.

The Declaration adopted at the ten-year review in 2005 recognized that the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the fulfillment of the commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are mutually reinforcing in achieving gender equality and empowerment of women. Over the past five years, ratification of the Convention and its Optional Protocol has continued steadily. Today, 186 countries have ratified the Convention and 98 have ratified the Optional Protocol. The backlog of reports to be considered by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women is significantly reduced. And it is particularly heartening that so many Member States refer in their national statements to the Commission on the Status of Women and the General Assembly to the importance of the Convention for their work at national level and their concrete efforts to ensure its full implementation on the ground. In December this year, the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention and the tenth anniversary of the adoption of its Optional Protocol are being celebrated around the world.

The Commission on the Status of Women has continued to play an important role in further advancing the global policy agenda on gender equality and empowerment of women, and in acting as a catalyst for the full implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy. Since 2005, the Commission highlighted three critical areas - the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against girls; the financing of gender equality and empowerment of women; the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDs. In each of these areas, the Commission developed concrete recommendations for action at global,

regional and national levels to advance the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The continued development of strong and vibrant networks of civil society groups, at national, regional and global levels, has been a positive aspect of developments over the past five years. Women's groups and networks, have increased in strength and effectiveness and have played a very strategic role in moving the global agenda on gender equality forward – in particular in relation to the issues I have discussed – violence against women, women, peace and security and the CEDAW Convention. Non-governmental organizations have energized the debates on critical areas and contributed to increasing the visibility and recognition of the importance of gender equality for development. A great deal of the sustained attention and the achievements made over the past decades has been due to their efforts. Their role in advocating for and monitoring implementation of the commitment made by Governments has been particularly significant. The increasing partnership between Governments and civil society is an extremely positive development, which is creating new and important synergies.

Despite efforts by Member States, the United Nations system and civil society since 2005, lack of implementation of the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in a number of critical areas remains a serious issue.

It is of particular concern that horrific forms of violence against women, especially in situations of armed conflict continue and impunity for these gross violations of women's human rights persists.

Progress with respect to Millennium Development Goal 5 on maternal health remains slow. More than 500,000 women die every year as a result of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. The global maternal mortality ratio declined by only 0.4 per cent annually between 1990 and 2005, a rate far below the 5.5 per cent annual decline necessary to meet the Goal 5 target of reducing the maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015. According to UNFPA, every minute, a woman dies of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth from mostly preventable and treatable medical problems.

Women's participation in decision-making is an area where the pace of change has also been very slow and uneven across regions. Positive change has been achieved in many countries, for example Rwanda where parity has been achieved, but the global average for women's representation in national parliaments is only 18.4 per cent. In other areas, such as the media, academia, and the judiciary, the lack of reliable, comparable data is a serious constraint. In the area of economic decision-making, for example, despite considerable evidence on the positive impact of women's representation, women are consistently absent from key decision-making bodies influencing the distribution of resources in both public and private sectors. Equal representation of women in all areas of economic decision-making, including at the highest levels in Government ministries, international organizations, corporate boards and the banking sector, needs to be pursued.

The *2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs focused on women's access to and control over resources and highlighted serious gaps in many areas. Long-standing inequalities in access to economic and financial resources have placed women at a disadvantage in relation to men in economic development. Despite their increased participation in the workforce, women are disproportionately represented in informal work, which is generally precarious, poorly paid, and not covered by labour legislation or social protection. Women's wages, according to the International Trade Union Confederation, are 16.5 per cent less than men's. The persistent unequal sharing of unpaid work between women and men, including care-giving, influences women's choices in the labour market.

Although women require access to a range of financial services – including savings, insurance, remittance transfers and credit - to allow them to fully benefit from economic opportunities, many women remain excluded from the formal financial sector. Microfinance institutions, while successful in reaching out to women, have not necessarily always empowered women. In particular, they have failed to meet the needs of successful women entrepreneurs wishing to expand their businesses. Women's livelihood strategies in many parts of the world also require access to a range of productive resources. In many parts of the world, however, women continue to face discrimination in access to land, housing and property, as well as the infrastructure, services and technologies needed to facilitate their effective use of these resources. And without access to the economic resources provided through social protection, many women around the world are unable to insure themselves against contingencies arising from old age, ill-health, disability, unemployment and other life-crises. The *Survey* emphasizes that even when economic rights for women exist, they may not be enforced or women may not be able to claim these rights because of socio-cultural norms and practices. Efforts are needed to make the judicial systems more accessible and responsive to women and to provide legal aid to women seeking to claim their rights.

One of the important findings in the ten-year review of implementation in 2005 was the gap between the global policy development on gender equality and empowerment of women and implementation at national level. Addressing this gap has been at the centre of the General Assembly's consideration of the reform of the gender equality architecture in the United Nations over the past three years. The adoption of General Assembly resolution A/63/311, endorsing the development of one composite gender equality entity through the merger of the four existing gender equality entities - OSAGI, DAW, UNIFEM and INSTRAW - has been hailed as a new milestone in the United Nations efforts for gender equality and empowerment of women. The composite entity is expected to significantly enhance the support of the United Nations system to the efforts of Member States at national level.

The United Nations system is therefore at the cusp of major change in its work on gender equality and women's empowerment. The adoption of resolution A/63/311 is an indication of the willingness and readiness of Member States to move forward with implementation of the needed changes in the gender equality architecture. The Secretary-

General is solidly behind a strengthened United Nations entity and has expressed his willingness to move expeditiously to respond to the resolution in order to bring the new gender equality entity into being as soon as possible. Expectations are high, and justifiably so. Many women around the world continue to be excluded from the full benefits of social and economic development and experience gender- based violence and other forms of abuse of their human rights. The time is ripe for this change.

We look forward to your unwavering support as we work to prepare the proposals for the design of a new composite entity that would be better resourced, have stronger field presence and a greater capacity to serve the Member States and all the women of the world. We look to Member States for a swift decision. The finalization of this process on the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action would indeed be a fulfilling achievement and a reaffirmation that the efforts of Member States, the United Nations system and women's organizations have indeed been worthwhile.

The whole United Nations stands ready to support Governments, civil society and other stakeholders in this region in their efforts to ensure the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at national level.

I wish you every success in your discussions and I am confident that you will be able to close this meeting with a sense of satisfaction at having taken another important step forward towards our common goal – the realization of gender equality and empowerment of women.

Thank you.