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Opening remarks
by
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Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the sixth session of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality. To those who have traveled from other duty stations I trust that you are well rested, and to those who are attending this meeting for the first time, I extend a very special welcome to you from all of us.

We are holding this meeting for the next three days as Mr. Ban-Ki Moon begins his tenure as the 8th Secretary General of the United Nations. In his initial statements Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon indicated his commitment to UN reform as well as to gender equality. Among his first appointments was Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, as the Deputy Secretary-General, the second woman to hold that position. I have already met with Dr. Migiro and briefed her on the Network's activities and assured her of our support as she takes on her new responsibilities.

Among the UN reform issues that will be under consideration by the General Assembly are the recommendations of the Secretary General's High Level Panel on UN system-wide Coherence in the areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment contained in the panel's report entitled "Delivering as One". One of the many recommendations contained in that report is the consolidation of OSAGI, DAW and UNIFEM into a single entity. While the Secretary-General accepted this recommendation, Member States have yet to announce themselves on it. As many of you suggested during our last inter-sessional meeting, how the new gender entity unfolds will

need to be monitored closely. My office will communicate to you the outcome of the deliberations.

It is important, however, to keep in mind that the essence of UN reform is to ensure a responsive, effective and result-driven UN system. The UN system must demonstrate concretely its ability to assist and support Member States in coping with the multiple challenges of poverty, rampant food insecurity, HIV/AIDS pandemic, frequent humanitarian crises and widespread civil conflicts. More than ever before the UN system must work more closely together and make progress towards One UN whether at the policy, normative or operational levels. Member States themselves are expecting to see more cooperation among UN entities. It is, therefore, important that we show results of better coordination.

During the past year, in my capacity as the chairperson of the Network I have participated in meetings of the Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB) and its two subsidiary bodies, the High Level Committee on Management (HLCM) and the High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP). I am pleased to report that all of the meetings discussed gender issues and I provided briefings on the work of the Network. As a result the CEB has now placed very high expectations on this Network. In particular, it is expected that the outcome of the Network's deliberations would inform and be reflected the UN entities policies and programmes on gender equality and empowerment of woman particularly with regard to enhancing coherence, coordination and collaboration. It is imperative that progress is made towards this goal through concrete proposals.

The Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality has continued to do commendable work throughout the year. The two inter-sessional meetings that were held yielded rich information and enabled progress on a number of fronts most notably the UN system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming. The inter-sessional meetings as well as this annual meeting have become important fora for clarifying UN system-wide issues, identifying challenges and most importantly arriving at possible solutions and future directions.

In this regard I want to commend the work that the Task Forces are doing which is a significant contribution to improved coordination. I know that many of you work under often serious financial constraints and heavy workload, yet many task forces have remained active and have made significant contributions to the work of various commissions and other inter-governmental processes. I want to thank the Task Force Managers for their dedication and to encourage you to continue in the same vein. Last year a new Task Force on Violence against Women was created in response to a ground breaking and long-awaited resolution on the same theme. During the meeting we shall hear more about this new task force and discuss how its work can become a flag bearer for UN in inter-agency coordination on combating violence against women.

Now let me briefly turn to the agenda of our meeting. As you have seen from the programme, we have gone back to our usual format of the meeting. Last year we suspended this format because of the directive from the Secretary General to devote the entire meeting to discussing a UN system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming. At the outset let me express my thanks to those of you who will be making presentations or moderating sessions.

We have several objectives that I would like us to meet by the end of this meeting. Firstly, I would like your input to the Report of the Secretary General on assessment of progress in gender mainstreaming in the policies and programmes of the United Nations System focusing on training and capacity development. This report, which will be prepared by my office will be discussed at the ECOSOC Coordination Segment in July 2007. A questionnaire was sent to you and I trust that all of you have either completed it or will do so by Friday 23rd February. Member countries are now demanding concrete evidence of how we implement resolutions applying to the UN system, so it is inevitable that we shall be asking you for similar inputs in the future.

Secondly I expect us to commence the operationalization of the UN system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming that was endorsed by the Chief Executive

Board for Coordination in October 2006. Specifically, the CEB was informed that upon receipt of its endorsement, work will commence on the development of an Action Plan with clear deliverables and a time line. This work must start now. Thirdly as a follow-up to the Report of the Secretary General on implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2006) that my office prepared with considerable input from you, we need to think of ways to strengthen the implementation of that resolution primarily at the country level in accordance with recommendations emanating from the report as well as from the Security Council Open debate. Country level implementation remains very weak and without it the resolutions good intentions will not bear fruit.

Fourthly, and as I mentioned earlier, we should develop approaches for the Implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/143 on “Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women” adopted in November 2006. This resolution offers a unique opportunity for us to scale up UN system-wide work on violence against women and to be more innovative.

Fifthly we shall also have an opportunity to discuss what strategies can be adopted for the improvement of the status of women in the UN system. The Report of the Secretary General on the Improvement of the Status of Women in the UN system contained findings that indicate the serious challenges that we face in this area.

Finally I hope that when you convene in your different task forces you will also reflect on how we can improve the working methods of the task forces themselves but also of our Network. Task Forces need to have very clear objectives that can be reached within specific timelines. I would also welcome improved and regular reporting from the task forces.

In order to fulfill these objectives the meeting is divided into two parts. Today and Thursday will be devoted to various short sessions on specific topics while tomorrow, Wednesday, we shall devote the entire day to a workshop focusing on gender equality

indicators and statistics on women. This is a topic that a majority of you have wanted an in-depth discussion on for some time now.

In conclusion I invite you to make your contributions freely and candidly. Your ideas and your thoughts are invaluable to this meeting. It is because of the diversity of the perspectives and experiences of the people in this room that we can make strides in pushing forward the agenda for gender equality. As usual I appeal to you to keep the time indicated in the programme so that we can begin and finish our sessions as planned.

I wish you all a fruitful meeting.

Thank you for your attention.
