

**Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality
New York, 24-26 February 2009**

**Opening Remarks by Rachel Mayanja
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Chairperson of IANWGE**

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Eighth meeting of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality. My particular welcome goes to colleagues from overseas and to all those who are attending this Meeting for the first time.

I look forward to a productive meeting. Our long agenda and tight schedule requires focus, cooperation and hard work over the next three days to enable us to make progress on the various items on our agenda. Many thanks to our inter-sessional task managers and working groups. Your work will ensure that we can fulfill our mandate to promote gender mainstreaming and the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

From our agenda it is clear that ALL issues concern women. As part of the United Nations system's quest for solutions to global problems of our day, gender mainstreaming approaches and strategies to the financial, economic and food crises, climate change, peace and security, MDGs, trade, violence against women and many other issues must be promoted.

Indeed, the UN system is at a critical juncture in its implementation of the UN peace and development agenda. Despite demonstrable progress, we confront delays in reaching the MDGs, including MDG3, coupled with new challenges, many of which require urgent attention and collective action. The financial turmoil of the past year, the fragile state of many economies, including major ones, and the persistent global imbalances are slowing growth of the global economy and threatening women's gains in economic empowerment. Rising food and energy prices are hitting hard on the livelihoods of the poor and vulnerable, primarily women. The profound impact of climate change and the deterioration of our natural environment already bear down on women's lives in many places, threatening to reverse the progress made since the Beijing Conference. Conflicts and violence continue unabated with deadly impacts on women's lives, livelihoods and human rights. Unless the global community devises workable solutions to these crises, their pernicious impacts on women will be deep and pervasive.

At the same time, looking back on 2008, we can see that challenges also offer opportunities. The High level event convened by the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly on 25 September 2008 on the Millennium Development Goals resulted in a raft of commitments on issues ranging from malaria prevention to reforestation. Gender equality was a cross cutting theme of three thematic roundtables which were set up to review progress, identify gaps and motivate commitments to bridge the gaps. The Danish Government MDG3 Global Call to Action generated significant support for new commitments from governments to achieve MDG3. But more is needed if gender equality is to be achieved by 2015, the target dates.

The Declaration of the Doha Review Conference and the Accra Agenda for Action acknowledged that most of the people living in extreme poverty were women and girls. They stated that addressing inequality in income and opportunity within countries and between states was essential to progress; that gender equality was amongst the corner stones for achieving enduring impact on the lives and potentials of poor men, women and children; and that both donor and developing countries' policies and programmes must be designed and implemented consistently with the global commitments on gender equality. Also, the High-level Conference on the World Food Security held in 2008 in Rome played a critical role in establishing a Comprehensive Framework for Action emphasizing the critical importance of gender equality.

Last summer, the Security Council for the first time, discussed the issue of sexual violence against women, as a theme. This issue emerged as a high intergovernmental priority in fighting violence against women and achieving sustainable peace and security. Security Council resolution 1820, which resulted from this discussion, expresses a clear mandate and commitment to combating this scourge in all conflict areas and supplements in this regard, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

The Secretary-General's Campaign, "UNite to End Violence against Women", has a solid conceptual foundation and its system-wide implementation is intensifying.

Many UN entities worked hard to bring about system-wide coherence in supporting Member States' efforts to achieve gender equality; implement the Secretary-General's Campaign "Unite to End Violence against Women"; enhance accountability for gender mainstreaming, in particular at the country level; develop a system-wide action plan to implement the UN system policy for gender equality and women's empowerment and strategy for gender mainstreaming, and enhance capacity building at the system-wide level.

These gains have been very important first steps to find solutions to global challenges and gender inequality. We must build on this progress and infuse a gender perspective in the implementation and follow-up of these policy frameworks.

Plans are under way to scale up achievement for MDG 3, creating a new strong momentum for mainstreaming a gender perspective into critical areas of climate change and trade, and responses to financial, economic and food crises; enhance women's

empowerment, including through decent work; coordinate UN system wide response to sexual and other forms of violence and many others.

Thanks to your efforts, system-wide cooperation and coherence are becoming an ineluctable fact of life. All UN entities are increasingly seeking to cooperate for the benefit of all. In the area of gender equality, we have, perhaps, moved forward ahead of the whole UN system with system-wide policy and strategy, accountability frameworks and action plans.

While responding to current challenges, our Network is also initiating change and developing tools for gender mainstreaming in the United Nations system, such as a system-wide action plan, accountability frameworks, mainstreaming tools, including for UN Country Teams; enhancing capacity building, creating knowledge management networks and data bases.

However much more needs to be done. To operationalize these plans and tools we must look at our policies, operational guidelines and programmes to make them more effective, coherent and flexible and articulate our joint action and programming more clearly.

This Network should become the principal venue for interagency dialogue and policy review on the effectiveness and coherence of interagency cooperation. The Network's system-wide membership and its broad agenda that cuts across multiple sectors, provide a unique opportunity to garner a wide range of inputs for a deepened dialogue and understanding of the system-wide cooperation agenda. These inputs are vital to the achievement of all UN goals and objectives.

The Network is an interactive forum where collective solutions to common and entity specific challenges are discussed and debated. Last year we had a record number of such dialogues through intersessional meetings of the Network. The Network contributed significantly to interagency advocacy efforts, development of new approaches and policies, harmonization of business practices, exchange of experience and capacity building.

I welcome this trend and would like to seek your views on how we could better use the potential of this Network, particularly, in the current climate when Member States are demanding greater coherence and coordination and more efficient use of resources allocated for gender equality and women's empowerment. Perhaps, interagency planning should be stepped up to include joint programming and a greater exchange of information and plans among the Network's members, by posting them either on WomenWatch or the Network's website. We need also to improve our planning of the work of Task Forces, review their terms of reference and come up with indicators and benchmarks to measure progress in achieving their goals.

While being proactive and developing our own projects, we also have to remain involved in the work *others* are doing. Fortunately, we have many critical opportunities this and next year to accelerate progress in achieving coherence and strengthening our support to Member States. The Conference on the Global Financial and Economic Crisis

on 1-4 June and the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) in Copenhagen will take place this year. It is critical to insert a gender perspective into the preparatory documents of these conferences. Our discussion on these issues should guide us on how to proceed and to “engender” them.

Another issue that requires our full attention is support to our colleagues in the field, with gender mainstreaming. Our colleagues from gender-focused and operational UN entities have done a lot of work to enhance gender mainstreaming in development, peace, humanitarian and human rights areas at the country level.

Yet, much more needs to be done to assist colleagues in the field and increase cooperation among field offices and between them and our Network. I hope that based on the suggestions of colleagues from around the world, including from UNIFEM who will brief us on mainstreaming in One UN Pilots, our Network will develop concrete strategies in this regard.

And finally, next year we will be celebrating the 15th anniversary of both Beijing and Cairo Conferences, as well as the 10th anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000). We are looking forward to your inputs and ideas on your entity specific, joint and system-wide initiatives and events to review UN system achievements and challenges.

Our agenda is tight and the decisions expected from us are plenty. But there will also be room for discussion and learning. We will have a number of experts from various sectors who will lead us through an exchange of ideas and in-depth discussions on selected topics. And, as always, we are all looking forward to learning more about the approaches and experiences of colleagues.

In concluding, let me say that we have worked well together over this past year. It was a collegial and united approach to promote gender equality issues. I count on your support to meet the challenges ahead of us.

I am looking forward to a good and productive meeting.

Thank you.