

**Feature Address**

**by**

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**at the**

**Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers meeting  
Opportunities and threats to the international gender equality agenda presented by  
current UN Reforms and UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women,  
peace and security**

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New York**

**Madam Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

**I am greatly honored to join you for this Commonwealth Women's Affairs Meeting and to be among so many outstanding women leaders whose dedication to the advancement of women and great visions of a new democratic, prosperous and gender equitable future help us, in the United Nations, to see more clearly where we can expect progress and where the areas of great concern are.**

**The Commonwealth is rightly described as a family of nations and like most successful families, has found ways of cooperating for the common good. By building on its shared attributes such as a common language, history and similar educational and governmental traditions,**

**the Commonwealth enables one-quarter of the world's people to feel connected to one another. I personally feel at home here, as a citizen of one of your Member States, Uganda, which will be the venue of the next Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting in 2007.**

**So, I did not hesitate for one minute before accepting, when Rawwida Baksh, Head of Gender, Social Transformation Programmes Division, kindly invited me to come here. I would like to thank the Commonwealth Secretariat for providing this timely opportunity to talk to you about current efforts to revitalize the international system and reform the United Nations and, in particular, how that effort relates to the important work for the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security that the Commonwealth is carrying out with such admirable focus and dynamism.**

**As Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the General Assembly in September 2003, we have come to a fork in the road. Down one route lies a world in which the United Nations strengthens its role as the collective instrument for protecting our peace and security, promoting development, human rights and gender equality. Down the other route lies a world in which the international community will yet again remain paralyzed in the face of conflict, terrorism, extreme poverty, deadly disease, violations of human rights and mass violence. The United Nations must not only be the world's primary forum for bringing**

**countries together, it must also be willing to take effective action when needed.**

**Today, we all share a world in which economic extreme poverty, environmental degradation and the spread of disease daily threaten the lives of billions and undermine longer-term stability; in which international terrorists strike down the innocent regardless of faith, sex or nationality; in which inequality, human rights violations, marginalization of the weak and vulnerable, ineffective political representation and government responsiveness, often translate into inadequate mechanisms to express and channel public discontent, only to spark conflict with the potential for repercussions on far away continents. These are today's leading threats. Thus, we must act and act together to ensure both human security and State security.**

**While there is no disagreement on that proposition, there are important differences when it comes to determining which threats should be our priority. The reality is that we do not have to choose and must confront all these threats and challenges because as the Secretary-General stressed “ a world in which many millions of people endure brutal oppression and extreme misery will never be fully secure.” Because the context of these threats is a globalized, ever more interdependent environment, states are less able than ever before to insulate themselves from outside influence – in security matters as with everything else.**

**Gender equality is an integral part of this new world order and offers a solution to the global threats. In the long run, the lack of**

**genuine gender equality hampers stability, sound economic development and social harmony. While women's inclusion and gender equality may not be a guarantee against conflict and underdevelopment, their absence virtually ensures it. Moreover, without women's participation, the whole society's ability to play an effective part in development, its social cohesion and political legitimacy of its government weaken, particularly, at a time of crisis when its constructive and creative role is more necessary than ever.**

**The system-wide action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) which was called for by the Security Council in 2004, and submitted by the Secretary-General, was endorsed by the Council last October.**

**Our experience at the interagency level in working on the system-wide action plan reflected the need for change, stronger commitment and accountability, not only on the part of the United Nations, but also of Governments. Many gender aspects of peacekeeping, peacemaking, post conflict reconstruction, peacebuilding and the fight against gender based violence are intertwined with persistent poverty, illiteracy, the spread of lethal pandemics, social exclusion and discrimination. Deprivation has many causal links to violence, providing breeding grounds for competition for resources, racial and ethnic intolerance and discrimination, particularly against women. Conversely, wars kill civilians, mostly women and children; destroy trust among social, ethnic, religious and gender groups; increase poverty and crime, and**

**slow down the economy. All areas falling under the prerogatives of Governments.**

**Therefore, the United Nations needs to work out streamlined modalities of cooperation and engagement with Governments to take into account the broad picture of development or conflict-related needs of each country. But beyond these policy changes, we, as an institution, need better operational coherence; avoiding duplications and overlaps; closing the gaps - particularly in the areas of conflict prevention, gender based violence and women and peacemaking - improving interagency coordination and internal accountability; and management responsibility for the full implementation of resolution 1325.**

**Thus, bold and far-reaching policy and institutional reforms are both urgent and necessary if the Organization is to provide an effective collective response to all the threats we face and advance development, security, human rights and gender equality.**

**Building on the reports of the High-level Panel and the Millennium Project, and with his eyes on the five-year review of the Millennium Declaration in September 2005, the Secretary-General issued his report entitled “In Larger Freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all” making the case that security and development are interdependent, and that neither can be sustained without respect for human rights and the rule of law. He put forward wide-ranging proposals for securing freedom from fear and freedom from want, for promoting the freedom to live in dignity, and for**

**strengthening the United Nations itself -- both the inter-governmental machinery and the management of the Secretariat.**

**The Summit Outcome marked a real step forward for the United Nations, in terms of what it can do as a forum and as a vehicle for development, security, human rights and gender equality. Before the Summit, we worked hard with Member States, including many Commonwealth delegations, and with civil society organizations to reflect gender aspects of many areas covered in the Summit Outcome, including the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, women and peace and gender mainstreaming to name a few.**

**Regarding women and peace, the Summit Outcome stressed the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding and reaffirmed the world leaders' commitment to the full and effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. It also underlined the importance of integrating a gender perspective and of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security, as well as the need to increase their role in decision-making at all levels.**

**I will now briefly highlight those decisions of the Summit and their follow ups that are particularly relevant in the context of the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).**

**First, the Outcome has placed a very strong emphasis on development. While vital in its own right, development is the most effective means of preventing conflict. Reform of ECOSOC, including a high level Development Cooperation Forum, is particularly important for the advancement of women, with the Commission on the Status of Women, the main advisory body to ECOSOC on women’s advancement and empowerment. The Summit committed itself to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including gender equality, and agreed on fresh efforts to live up to the commitments made in the Monterrey Consensus and at Johannesburg, by adding 50 billion dollars a year to fight poverty, liberalize trade, provide relief for heavy indebtedness and realize the “quick wins” actions identified by the United Nations Millennium Project, including an end to primary-school user fees, the three-million-patients target for AIDS anti-retroviral treatment, and national campaigns to reduce violence against women.**

**Second, the critical role of the Security Council in maintaining peace and security, the continued strong interest among Member States in Council reform, and the widely held view that reform of the Security Council should make it more broadly representative, efficient and transparent deserve particular attention from a gender point of view. A more broadly representative Security Council, one that better reflects the geopolitical realities of today, would be more authoritative and, therefore, more effective in protecting women’s rights and enhancing their role in peace processes. Unfortunately, while the view of a more representative Council is widely shared among the membership, differing views on the details persist, impeding progress towards a**

**resolution. Constructive dialogue now under way and the multitude of ideas and contributions from Member States on the best way towards a reform of the Security Council, allow us to hope for a speedy and equitable solution that is effective and meets with broadest possible agreement.**

**Third, the Summit agreed to the creation of a new intergovernmental Peacebuilding Commission, which would play a central role in helping States emerging from violent conflict. Women and girls are primary targets of violence in conflict and post conflict societies. While they bear the brunt of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, they have limited access to decision-making and to resources, and their contributions are often ignored. The Commission thus would play a critical role in enhancing women's involvement in post-conflict development. My Office, in cooperation with gender focal points and civil society, works with the Office of the Secretary-General to engender the work of the Commission, its dedicated Support Office within the United Nations Secretariat and is following with interest, the Peacebuilding Fund. It is critical that all three entities systematically integrate a gender perspective in peacebuilding programmes and policies; that all country specific interventions reflect gender related norms and standards; that women participate in decision-making and that they promote prevention and effective response to gender based violence. Work on details of representation of all key groups in future peacebuilding endeavours is under way.**

**Fourth, the Summit decided to replace the Commission on Human Rights with a smaller, more focused Human Rights Council. The Secretary-General has been very forthright in stating his views about the serious shortcomings of the current Commission on Human Rights. Given the centrality of women's rights, we have high expectations of the Council. The new Council would meet throughout the year, be better able to respond to emergencies, including gender based violence, and have a mandate to look at human rights conditions in all countries, including those in armed conflict and post conflict situations. We are discussing with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, how to bring about conceptual and architectural clarity in the work of the Council and the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women, with a view to secure for women's human rights, the central place they deserve. A final resolution on the Council is awaited.**

**Fifth, the Summit endorsed the concept of the responsibility to protect, an issue of particular interest to women in armed conflict situations. Rape, forced pregnancies, sexual slavery and assault have become deliberate instruments of war. These realities make the issues of protection of women and girls and their human rights, particularly salient features of reform. While most countries seem to share the fundamental goal of preventing genocide, ethnic cleansing and mass rapes and killing, currently, there is no uniform understanding among Member States on the exercise of the responsibility to protect, with some expressing concerns about lowering the normative barriers to**

**unwarranted interventions in internal affairs, while others fearing there will be too little intervention and the victims will be left to suffer.**

**Sixth, the Summit decided on a comprehensive Convention and strategy against terrorism. The Summit has argued for a clear and unqualified condemnation by all Governments of terrorism “in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and for whatever purposes.” Both the Convention and the strategy when implemented, will contribute to a safer and more stable world for the benefit of both, women and men. The Sixth Committee of the General Assembly started laying the framework of the Convention and work is under way on the strategy.**

**Seventh, the Secretary-General has been pushing management reform at the United Nations for nearly nine years, in order to make the Organization more effective on the ground and open up to civil society. Women are one of the primary stakeholders in the management reform. Implementation of gender mainstreaming mandates, prevention of sexual harassment and exploitation and the achievement of the goal of 50/50 representation in the Secretariat and in peace operations are particularly affected by the current deficiencies in transparency, accountability and management responsibility. Moreover, Gender units are under-resourced and overworked.**

**Three factors impel management reform: the first being an explosion of new mandates in the last 15 years, particularly in social and economic fields, including gender, while there has been almost no**

**growth in the basic budget, and the Secretary-General has little flexibility to move resources to new priorities. The second impulse for change comes from expressions of concern from Member States and civil society about the Organization's efficiency and credibility in dealing with the Oil-for-Food Programme, procurement irregularities in peacekeeping and sexual exploitation by United Nations staff and related personnel. The third factor is the ongoing institutional change whereby the United Nations is moving from norm setting, conference servicing and research activities to operations characterized by fast shifting priorities.**

**That is one reason why, in his reform proposals, the Secretary-General asked Member States to end the era of micromanagement and lack of clear lines of responsibility, and replace it with an era of management responsibility and genuine accountability. Although Member States did not quite agree to go that far yet, they gave the Secretary-General the green light to move ahead to strengthen ethics; protect whistleblowers; review all rules on management of budgetary, financial and human resources; review all mandates more than five years old; a framework for a one-time buyout of staff; conduct an independent external evaluation of the entire oversight system; and submit proposals for a new independent oversight advisory committee. A report on management reform is being finalized to be presented next month to the General Assembly.**

**Eighth, at the level of the United Nations system and as requested by the Summit, the Secretary-General has established a new, high-level**

**panel co-chaired by H. E. Ms. Luísa Dias Diogo, Prime Minister of Mozambique and H.E. Mr. Shaukat Aziz, Prime Minister of Pakistan to explore how the United Nations system could work more coherently and effectively across the world in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. The study, which is due in June 2006, is intended to lay the groundwork for a fundamental restructuring of the United Nation's operational work, complementing other major reform initiatives mentioned above. Interagency cooperation is a key to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and resolution 1325 (2000). There is a proliferation of mandates given by various intergovernmental bodies often leading to duplication of efforts of several United Nations entities or gaps in what needs to be done on the ground. There is an urgent need to clarify modalities of communication and support to, as well as “rules of engagement” with Governments and civil society. In addition, interagency cooperation particularly with regard to crosscutting issues such as gender and human rights, needs to be streamlined and strengthened.**

**During such intensive reform discussions with several issues being considered by different groups simultaneously, the risks that gender equality could be eclipsed or subsumed by other priorities are high. We must continue the demand for engendering these reforms and keep pushing for gender equality. There are a number of ways that the Commonwealth Women’s Affairs Ministers can further the reform process and mainstream gender in the various related initiatives, including by:**

- (a) Calling on its members to ensure that gender equality and the advancement of women, particularly in conflict and post-conflict situations, are firmly embedded not only in mandates but in the daily work of the Peace-building Commission, a reformed Security Council and a new human rights architecture, and include gender equality as a standing item on their agenda;**
  
- (b) Having consultations with responsible national Ministries and civil society throughout the Commonwealth countries on how to improve cooperation with United Nations entities in order to make it more responsive to women's needs, more effective and streamlined;**
  
- (c) Further reflecting on how to better integrate conflict prevention gender related aspects in development, thereby linking them with MDGs processes;**
  
- (d) Fully implementing 1325, including through the development and implementation of national action plans as requested by the Security Council in S/PRST/2004/40;**
  
- (e) Raising awareness and support among its members of the vital need to support the reform process and playing an active role in that process to make sure that gender is prominently reflected in the related intergovernmental decisions;**
  
- (f) Calling on its members to cooperate with the United Nations in the context of reform.**

**Although the fate of the reforms now depends on the decisions of Member States, we are all – Member States, the United Nations system and civil society - responsible to bring about change. The push for gender equality, development and peace must now be intensified. Every single one of us here today must become engaged in order to transform commitments into concrete results to bring about the change. That must remain the goal, and we will be looking to Member States like members of the Commonwealth to help us achieve it.**

**Thank you and I wish you productive deliberations.**