

Remarks by

Ms. Rachel Mayanja

Special Adviser

on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women

at

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and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority

On

"Equal Participation of women and men in decision making processes at all levels"
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Madam Chairperson,
President, Dr. Rice,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak at this important event on "Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes at all Levels." At the outset, I would like to congratulate Femmes Africa Solidarite and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority for organizing this panel. I would like to thank you for your tireless efforts to bring about the empowerment of women and for giving me this opportunity to reflect on how to overcome the many barriers that exist to women's opportunities towards greater involvement in decision-making.

The work for equal participation of women in decision making started from the day the United Nations was created. Our Charter proclaims the equal rights of men and women. The equal participation of women and men in public life is one of the cornerstones of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 called on all Governments, NGOs and international organizations to ensure women's equal access to, and full participation in decision-making. The United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on *Women, Peace and Security*, the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals (MDGs), as well as the Summit that gathered all world's leaders in September 2006, recognized the fundamental role of women in decision-making on peace and development.

Thus, my main message today is that without increased representation of women in decision-making and ensuring their equal opportunity to participate fully in the political process, we will not be able to achieve the goals of peace, development and human rights set in the Summit Outcome, nor will we be able to promote gender equality and eliminate gender discrimination as mandated in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Why? There are three answers: justice, efficiency and diversity.

Justice, because women constitute half of any country's population and therefore have a right to constitute half of all decision-making bodies. Equal participation of men and women in decision-making is a precondition for the functioning of democracy and society.

Efficiency, because a political system which does not draw upon both women's and men's experiences and resources equally, is by its very nature inefficient. The involvement of women in policy making can improve transparency and accountability.

Diversity, because in general, women and men perform different tasks and live in different economic and social conditions. Therefore they have separate political interests. The impact of women's work at the local and national political levels is also more visible for their constituency. They tend to draw more attention to the immediate needs of the community such as education, water and sanitation issues, than their male counterparts. Leadership shown by women in the world's poorest communities is a vital tool for achieving the goals, and increasing their number in local and national decision-making and is therefore important, not only for women but for men, children and all communities and nations.

It is not surprising that the on-going session of the Commission on the Status of Women is considering the theme on "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels."

I am very pleased to see that delegations, mostly represented at the ministerial level, look for practical tools and decisions not only for a numeric increase in women's representation, but also for ways to enhance the impact of women's decisions on shaping local and national politics. They share their rich national experience on enhancing women's contributions to decision making, including constitutional, electoral and party quotas; providing household assistance to women candidates; training of grass roots women for leadership and political participation; setting up special funds to support women candidates; media campaigns to encourage women to participate in political life; providing security in conflict and post conflict countries and many other initiatives.

Implementation and making a difference in each country is becoming our new mantra. Ten years after Beijing, women and men enjoy equal rights with regard to franchise in almost every country in the world. In most countries, also, *de jure* equality exists between women and men in the area of political participation. But only now, the international community is beginning to grasp the complexities of implementing the fundamental principle of equal participation in decision making if we are to push for development, peace and human rights with equal determination.

Allow me to give you a broad overview on where we stand today.

At the global level, according to International Parliamentary Union (IPU) data (as of 27 February 2006), global trends show that more women participate in decision-making in legislative and executive branches since 1995.

- Women's participation in parliaments is now the highest it has ever been: 16.4 per cent across all parliaments. This should be compared with 10.9 per cent in 1975, 30 years ago.
- The number of parliaments that have reached the United Nations target of 30 per cent women representatives, which was set for 1995, is 20.
- The number of parliaments worldwide in which women representatives constitute less than 10 per cent has decreased significantly from 63 per cent in 1995 to 37 per cent in 2005.
- Post-conflict countries (Afghanistan, Burundi, Iraq, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa and Timor Leste) in a relatively short time span, increased the representation of women dramatically, with Rwanda leading the world with the highest percentage of women in parliament at 48.8 per cent. In Afghanistan, women's representation jumped from zero to 27 per cent; in South Africa it went up from 2.7 per cent to 25 per cent of seats; in Burundi from 18 per cent to 30.5 percent. In Iraq women account for 25 per cent of seats in parliament. These trends have in common a growing role of women in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding, a dynamic national women's movement and a determined support of the international community for the election of women to parliament.
- In the executive branch, with recent elections of three remarkable women in Germany, Liberia and Chile, women of the world made a quantum leap of more than 30 per cent increase in their representation at the highest level.
- Sweden, with 52.4 per cent of women ministers, tops the chart together with Spain, Austria and soon Chile (50 per cent).
- World-wide, 14 per cent of ministers are women.

At the regional level in the legislative branch, the following trends have been noticed by IPU (data as of 27 February 2006):

- The Nordic countries have maintained their leading position with averages over 40 per cent of women in parliaments.
- Excluding the Nordic countries, European women's representation stands at 16.9 per cent.
- The least represented are women of the Arab states with 8.2 per cent of seats compared to 4 per cent eight years ago. Much of progress can be attributed to the use of quotas in some countries of the region such as Djibouti, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco and Tunisia.

- In the Americas an impressive 7 per cent increase from 12 per cent to 19.6 per cent is attributable to affirmative actions taken by 17 countries in Latin and Central America.
- The representation of Asian and Pacific women remains almost stable at 16.3 per cent and 12.0 per cent respectively.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, an increase of 6.7 per cent to 16.4 per cent is attributable to an open commitment to improve women's participation in politics and the implementation of affirmative actions such as constitutional quotas (Rwanda and Burundi), while in most other African countries including South Africa and Mozambique the dominant political parties introduced party quota mechanisms.

Undeniably, women have made important gains.

But can you imagine a world with only 11 male Heads of State and Government out of 191, or 14 per cent of male ministers or 16 per cent male parliamentarians? Hardly!

Then, you will agree that women are woefully under-represented. Overall progress has been steady, but the pace has been far too slow. As of 30 September 2005, there are still eight countries with no women in their national parliaments

In the United Nations itself, progress on women's representation is limited and uneven and the goal of reaching 50/50 has not been achieved. As of 30 June 2005 in the larger group of Professional staff with appointments of one year or more, the representation of women stands at:

- 37 per cent overall with no change from 2004;
- 27 per cent at the D-1 level and above, a decrease from 29 per cent since 2004.

Women are also under-represented world-wide in economic decision-making, particularly, in the higher paid, higher prestige sectors of the workforce. Just to give a few examples from developed countries as follows:

- In Italy only 21 per cent of administrators and managers are women, and in the Netherlands only 26 per cent.
- In the United States, women hold 50.3 per cent of all management and professional positions, but only 7.9 per cent of Fortune 500 top earners and 1.4 per cent of Fortune 500 CEOs are women.

Critical barriers to women's equal participation in decision-making are deeply rooted in the persistence of stereotypical attitudes on the roles of women - inequitable sharing of family responsibilities between women and men, the absence of enabling

environments in political institutions, and women's exclusion from decision-making in critical policy domains, such as international affairs and the economy.

What should be done?

The status quo is not acceptable. We need to build an effective supportive environment for women's participation in decision making with an appropriate institutional and legal framework. Of course, this framework should be adapted in different countries to different political contexts. But regardless of these country-specific contexts, I would like to stress a number of common principles around which such enabling environment could be built:

- Participation: promotion of equal participation and equal opportunities by women and men in governance institutions and processes.
- Affirmative action: if mandatory quotas, voluntary targets, minimum thresholds work, I say let us use them whether some like it or not. The legal grounds for affirmative action are laid in general recommendation 23 of the CEDAW Committee which called for all necessary measures, including temporary special measures, to achieve the equal representation of women in political and public life.
- Transparency: ensuring transparency and equity in the allocation of resources for women and men candidates.
- Legitimacy: legislation on gender equality and the promotion and protection of women's rights should be fully implemented and followed.
- Effectiveness: elected or appointed women in decision-making positions should be fully integrated into governance structures (for example, committees of parliaments).

The creation of the enabling environment for the empowerment of women along the lines specified in CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, requires serious and sustained efforts. We should abandon the idea that women alone can advance the gender equality agenda in decision-making. Everyone should be involved and accountable for that agenda.

The whole system of governance, in all areas, should be accountable for gender equality in their public actions. Success in achieving the goals of Beijing and the Summit Outcome does not just benefit from women's empowerment - it depends on it.

Thank you for your attention.
