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ECOSOC

Panel Discussion on the theme "Towards a United Nations comprehensive response to the challenges of climate change"

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Armen MARTIROSYAN,
Chairperson of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women**
Tuesday, 14 July from 11.00 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Palais des Nations, Geneva

Introductory remarks

- I am pleased to address the important issue of climate change in my capacity as Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women. Throughout its history, the Commission has given significant attention to the role of women in sustainable development. For that exact reason the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 included 'Women and the Environment' as one of the critical areas of concern. The five-year review of the implementation of the Platform for Action in 2000 also highlighted issues of gender and sustainable development.
- Since 2000, the Commission has been raising specifically issues of sustainable development and climate change, constantly inviting attention to these issues and stressing the importance of identifying and addressing gender equality issues in relation to environmental management and climate change.
- At its 46th session in 2002, the Commission took up climate change when it addressed environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters. The adopted agreed conclusions called for action to mainstream a gender perspective into the ongoing research by, inter-alia, the academic sector on the impact of climate change, including its root causes, and to encourage the application of the results of this research in policies and programmes (para 7(e)).

- Last year at its 52nd session, the Commission adopted agreed conclusions on "*Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women*" which called on Governments to ensure women's participation in decision-making at all levels on environmental issues, in particular on strategies related to climate change. Gender analysis of all budget lines and financial instruments for climate change is needed to ensure gender-sensitive investments in programmes for adaptation, mitigation, technology and capacity building. It is particularly important at local levels.
- The Commission's agreed conclusions on "*The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including in the context of HIV/AIDS*" adopted at this year's session called for the equal participation of women in decision-making processes on sustainable development, including those that address the impact of climate change on women.
- In 2008, the Commission decided to focus on the gender perspectives of climate change as its emerging issue. An interactive expert panel was organized to consider the gender equality aspects of climate change. A number of key observations and recommendations were made which I would like to share with you now.

Disproportionate impact of climate change on women

- Climate change can have significant direct impact on women's lives. Women make up a large number of the poor in communities, which are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood, and are disproportionately vulnerable to and affected by climate change. Women's limited access to resources and decision-making processes increases their vulnerability.
- Women in developing countries are primarily responsible for the production of food, mostly through subsistence forms of production, and are highly exposed to the risks that come with drought and uncertain rainfall. Deforestation too has a negative effect on women, as they rely directly on forest resources to meet health, nutritional and economic needs of their families and communities.

- Nevertheless, women should not only be viewed as victims of climate change, but also as effective agents of change in relation to both mitigation and adaptation. Their strong knowledge and expertise can be used in climate change mitigation, disaster reduction and adaptation strategies. Women's responsibilities in households and communities as stewards of natural resources have positioned them well for livelihood strategies adapted to changing environmental realities. Women tend, however, to be under-represented in decision-making processes on climate change, impeding their ability to contribute their valuable perspectives and expertise.
- Participants at the organized interactive panel in Commission noted increased recognition of the importance of involving women fully in efforts to combat climate change. Actions being taken to increase women's participation include advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives, provision of information and training for women, efforts to include women in the climate change negotiations, and initiatives to increase attention to gender perspectives in policy formulation and evaluation. The critical role of civil society organizations in these efforts was highlighted.

Opportunities and challenges

- Let me conclude by highlighting what I see as some of the opportunities we should utilize fully and some remaining challenges we should address.
- The long-standing interest of the Commission on the Status of Women in gender equality and environmental issues provides an opportunity to identify critical perspectives and find ways to address them. The Commission has in the past transmitted its conclusions and/or recommendations to the ECOSOC and to the Commission on Sustainable Development. With this regard, the increased interaction between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Sustainable Development as well as the Permanent Forum on Forest and other bodies focusing on climate change could be a positive development.
- Within the context of its new multi-year program of work, in 2012, at its fifty-sixth session, the Commission on the Status of Women will focus on "*The*

empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges". This topic will provide an important occasion to address the impact of climate change on rural women. The Commission could cooperate with the Sustainable Development Commission on this issue. The outcome of the Commission's session could be transmitted to ECOSOC and widely disseminated among the UN entities at headquarters and at country level.

- Challenges that need to be addressed include the lack of sex-disaggregated data which is necessary for forming policy responses. In this regard, the Commission on the Status of Women could continue the valuable cooperation established over a number of years with the Statistical Commission. A further challenge is the lack of systematic mainstreaming of gender perspectives into the work of the United Nations on climate change. The Council may wish to encourage its functional commissions, especially the Commission on Sustainable Development, to incorporate gender perspectives into reports and outcomes related to climate change.
- At the intergovernmental level, the gender dimensions of climate change have not been discussed in key fora. Critical instruments, such as the Kyoto Protocol and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), do not make specific references to women and climate change. The Bali Plan of Action did not address the specific concerns of women. Strengthened efforts are needed to ensure that gender perspectives are mainstreamed into key processes and outcomes.
- The Commission on the Status of Women stands ready to cooperate with ECOSOC and other functional commissions on this important topic, and to utilize its specific expertise to ensure greater attention to gender perspectives in climate change as a means to ensure effective adaptation and mitigation strategies.