

ECOSOC High Level Segment
Opening Session
New York, 28 June 2010

Informal summary

Opening of the High-level Segment

The high-level segment of the substantive session of the 2010 Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was opened by **H.E. Ambassador Hamidon Ali, President of Economic and Social Council and H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations**. In his opening remarks, Ambassador Ali, highlighted that the high-level segment is an occasion to focus on some of the most pressing issues in development, particularly in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women, now made more challenging by the subdued pace of economic growth.

Ambassador Ali stated that the high-level segment must not only be a forum for the exchange of views and experiences, but also must produce tangible results in terms of policy guidance and the promotion of development policy coherence. He stated that delegations agreed to an approach to the Ministerial Declaration that is short, action-oriented and clear. He reiterated his view of the changes needed in the Council, whereby the Council must:

- adopt a proactive and constructive agenda with purposeful actions;
- adopt shorter, more focused agreements and resolutions;
- do more to improve the atmospherics surrounding ECOSOC, including promoting greater transparency and honest dialogue where concerns are clearly understood;
- move beyond stale arguments; and
- do justice to ECOSOC's role in the operational aspects of the work of the United Nations.

On the theme of this year's Annual Ministerial Review, "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women," Ambassador Ali noted that it allows the Council to strengthen the linkages between gender equality, women's human rights and non-discrimination as a basis for progress in development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. While MDG-3 relates directly to the empowerment of women, all MDGs are dependant upon women having a greater say in their own development. Nowhere else is the mutual interdependence between development and human rights stronger than in the issue of gender.

The ECOSOC President stated that the DCF is an opportunity to accelerate progress in strengthening the global partnership for development. He noted that the Forum has the potential to become the principal venue for global dialogue and policy review on the effectiveness and coherence of international development cooperation.

However, the potential of the DCF is constrained by the fact that it is held only once every two years, produces only a Chair's summary and is not institutionally linked to any other processes related to development cooperation either within or outside the UN. These issues will need to be addressed during the 65th session of the General Assembly.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon stated that the world is still grappling with the aftershocks of the economic and financial, food and energy crises that have set back efforts towards the Millennium Development Goals and threaten future progress. Global financial and economic uncertainty continues, the recovery from the most severe recession in recent history has been tentative and uneven, and tens of millions more people have been pushed into extreme poverty and unemployment.

Despite these setbacks, the Secretary-General stated that there is reason for optimism. The 2010 Millennium Development Goals Report shows that significant progress has been made in reducing poverty, increasing access to education, reducing child mortality and the incidences of measles, malaria and increasing access to antiretroviral treatment for HIV/AIDS. These successes, many of which have taken place in the world's poorest countries, show that the MDGs are achievable with the right policies, adequate investment and reliable international support.

The Secretary-General also stated that overall progress has been uneven, and that several Goals are likely to be missed, especially in least developed countries, land-locked developing countries, small island developing states and countries in or emerging from conflict. Climate change also remains a threat to sustainability, hunger and food insecurity continues and stubborn disparities persist between rich and poor, rural and urban, and males and females.

He stated that the message he delivered to the G20 leaders over the weekend, and that he will take to the MDG Summit in September, is that the vast majority of the world's people still need and deserve drastic improvements in their quality of life, and a world where the benefits of economic and social development reach everyone. A concrete plan of action that provides a clear roadmap to meet the promise by 2015 must be agreed upon.

He affirmed that ECOSOC, as the UN's central forum for international economic and social issues, has an important role to play. Three urgent areas for focus are jobs, food security and, where the most progress is needed, investing in women. The Secretary-General stated that until women and girls are liberated from poverty and injustice, all our goals – peace, security, sustainable development – stand in jeopardy.

The Secretary-General stressed that of all the MDGs, the one where we have achieved the least success is on maternal health. He urged the Council to generate support for the Joint Action Plan on Women's and Children's Health. He stated that the recent 15-year review of the Beijing Declaration should feed directly into the Council's negotiations and in the outcome of the MDG Summit in September.

He stated that the creation of UN Women will mark a significant advance towards further strengthening our capacity to work with Member States to coherently meet the needs of women and girls.

Keynote addresses

H.E. Mr. Andrew Mitchell, Secretary of State for International Development of the United Kingdom stressed that promoting gender equality is vital for meeting the MDGs and for creating a prosperous, safe and peaceful world. Where women have access to health services, education and economic growth, their children are healthier and better educated. By contrast, where women and girls are treated as inferior, a vicious cycle of limited education, poor employment opportunities, ill-health, and all too frequently, forced marriage, violence and exploitation is perpetuated. Focusing more support on women and girls offers an opportunity to replace this vicious cycle with a virtuous one.

He underlined the important leadership role of the United Nations in promoting gender equality signified by the appointment of its first Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. He also hoped that this week would see the conclusion of negotiations establishing a single, composite UN Gender Entity and urged support and commitment to this important new entity.

With just five years remaining before the target date of 2015, Mr. Mitchell stated that it is clear that the goals will only be achieved by putting a renewed focus on gender equality and women's empowerment, noting that maternal health is the most off-track of all the MDGs. However, we have the technology and political will to significantly reduce maternal mortality, and tackling this MDG is a major priority for the UK's new coalition government. The UN must also increase its impact in this issue. He also applauded the launching of the Global Effort to Advance Progress on Women's and Children's Health.

He further stated that maternal health is not just about giving birth. It is also the whole continuum of care from pre-pregnancy through to child health. Globally, more than 215 million women do not have access to modern methods of family planning. Improving reproductive and maternal health is the linchpin of poverty eradication.

H.E. Ms. Moushira Khattab, Minister of State for Family and Population Affairs of Egypt affirmed that progress has been achieved in many critical areas to empower women to equally enjoy their rights. One of the achievements is a human rights system that has created a supportive environment where rights are monitored with transparency and accountability, thanks to a reporting process where states parties submit their reports to the treaty bodies and together they engage in a constructive dialogue. Statistical averages are no longer accepted as sufficient, as they hide disparities that deprive the most vulnerable of equal opportunities.

Many States were accordingly encouraged to enforce legal frameworks to protect the rights of women and children. Adequately mandated and well-resourced national entities were established to monitor such rights, national action plans were formulated, the role of civil society recognized and viable partnerships established. Participation of women has emerged stronger in making decisions that affect their lives and coalitions supportive of their rights have been established and strengthened.

Ms. Khattab gave examples of how Egypt has made gender equality and the empowerment of women a political commitment and priority, such as engendered design and implementation of policies and budget tracking with a view to allocating more resources for development programmes supportive of women. Egypt has also established bodies to monitor and coordinate the rights of women and children. Women were granted equal civil and political rights, as well as rights to participate in economic, social and cultural development, and priority was given to the enhancement of women's participation in the economic management. Egypt's Constitution was also amended to allocate a quota of 64 seats in parliament for women. Anti-trafficking legislation was adopted this year and a societal movement to uphold the rights of the girl was launched.

She concluded by stating that the challenges still faced by the global community are cause for considerable concern. Millions of women across the globe are still victims of discrimination and harmful practices and suffer gender-based violence, economic discrimination and lack access to basic reproductive health services. She stressed that the need is dire to make the treaty bodies, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an integral part of the United Nations' efforts to empower women, fulfill their rights and achieve the MDGs.

H.E. Ms. Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile stated that 15 years after Beijing there has been major progress, but it has been far from uniform. We must continue to give our attention to the harsh realities that persist and that are intolerable. Human rights and gender equality are universal and women's rights are human rights. We must also put an end to laws and institutions that perpetuate discrimination against women and the international community must act decisively to "move mountains." Equality must be both *de jure* and *de facto*, and all of society needs to encourage progress and work to get rid of anachronistic prejudice and discrimination.

Ms. Bachelet drew from her experience as president of Chile through the end of March 2010 to give examples of policies that promoted gender equality and the empowerment of women and that made progress in advancing social protection. She stated that there was an explicit decision to make women visible and give them due consideration in all policy decisions. Participation of civil society was sought out, and an advisory commission on gender was established. Several important bills on gender equality were sent to the Congress, where many were passed quickly.

She stated that prejudices do not die easily and that she felt pressure to show that female leadership can be efficient and obtain results. There are many places where there is a real opposition to women, such as in access to certain jobs or in access to credit. A key law that was passed during her tenure as president was to establish salary equality for women and men performing the same work. There was also a pension reform so that women from the lowest three income quintiles will have pensions. Reproductive rights were broadened and the morning-after pill was legalized. Childhood support programmes were established, including nurseries and kindergarten for children from vulnerable families.

She concluded by stating that her outlook is optimistic, but that we need to work hard to implement democracy and freedom for all, including for women. Much more must be done to increase the participation of women, and we must insist that women are included in all aspects of society. We must be continually committed to gender equality.

Ms. Francis Stewart, Chair, Committee for Development Policy, addressed promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women in the context of the MDG Gender Equality Taskforce. She discussed the three domains identified by the taskforce: *the capability domain*, *access to resources*, and *the security domain*, and also added the fourth, the domain of *decision-making and power*. In each area there have been advances, but large gender gaps remain.

The capability domain involves working to increase access of women and girls to education, training and health. UNDP states that the ratio of girls to boys in educational attainment has risen in many places, for example, in Africa it rose to 0.65 in 2010 from 0.3 in 1970. However, there are still unwarranted gaps. Education is essential and it contributes to health, nutrition and a proper economic status for women and families. The promotion of female education must be a priority everywhere.

Access to resources refers to assets, including land and finance, and employment. Traditionally, women didn't have rights to own land or have access to financial credit. Progress has been made, but the issue has not been completely solved. Today, many women can inherit and own land, but women still work for lower wages and have longer hours than their male counterparts.

The security domain focuses on the protection from violence of all kinds, political, criminal and domestic. In this domain, sufficient progress has not been made. There has been growth in the crime of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Domestic violence represents the greatest threat to the greatest number of women. Across countries, 16% to 50% of women have been assaulted at some point in their lives. Domestic violence is believed to decrease when women become more educated and empowered.

The last domain, *decision making and power*, concentrates on the fact that women need to have more power and need to participate in making decisions both politically and economically. Women's representation has increased in parliaments from

11% in 1975 to 19% today. But it is not enough and we have to have significantly more progress in order for women to be considered equal to men.

Ms. Stewart also directed attention to the issues of financial credit and government policy. She stated that micro-credit is often a lifeline for low-income women and their families but that women's access to credit beyond micro-credit needs to be facilitated. She also stated that governments should create and strengthen policies to promote gender equality and empower women during the time of crisis because it is an opportunity, instead of overlooking. She concluded by emphasizing the importance of the progress made and the risk that this progress can still be reversed.

Policy messages from Annual Ministerial Review preparatory meetings

The **Africa Regional Preparatory Meeting** on “**Women and Health**” took place in Dakar, Senegal on 12-13 January 2010. More than 100 participants from government, civil society, private sector and academy participated in the discussions about the disproportionate health burden women face with regards to maternal health and HIV/Aids; and how women's empowerment is crucial to overcoming inequalities in health and meeting the MDGs. H.E. Ms. Ndeye Khady Diop, Minister of Family, Food Security, Gender Equality and Child Welfare of Senegal delivered the following key recommendations to the Council via video link:

1. *Improve healthcare and ensure access to medical services;*
2. *Strengthen the role of midwives;*
3. *Create a set of integrated services and programs of HIV prevention accessible to mothers;*
4. *End sexual and domestic violence and eliminate legal frameworks that protect perpetrators;*
5. *Give young people access to sexual education to adopt a prudent behaviour;*
6. *Invest in health literacy campaigns and strengthen decision-making capacities for women;*
7. *Develop legal frameworks against discrimination of people living with HIV/Aids;*
8. *Integrate gender issues into health care and strengthen synergies between the health care sector and other sectors;*
9. *Promote the benefits of universal healthcare and the importance of training for development;*
10. *Urge civil society, private sector to come together in partnerships and promote women's empowerment;*
11. *Improve sanitary situations;*
12. *Use ICT for the empowerment of women;*
13. *Provide financing for education;*
14. *Empower women economically;*
15. *Review recruitment and retention policies and integrate women in the health care personnel in rural areas.*

The Global Preparatory Meeting on “*Who feeds the world in 2010 and beyond? Rural women as agents of change and champions of global food security*”, held in New York on 22 April 2010, stressed the importance of empowering rural women and regarding them as agents of change and as a critical force in reducing poverty, hunger and promotion of development. But when it comes to investments and policies, women’s contribution to food security and agricultural production is largely invisible. H.E. Ms. Florence Chenoweth, Minister of Agriculture of Liberia delivered the following key recommendations to the Council:

1. *Invest in agriculture in general and rural women in particular. There is an urgent need of cohesive investment plans to advance the role rural of women and to address their specific needs;*
2. *Need to recognize women as stakeholders, not only as beneficiaries;*
3. *Rural women must be seen as agents of change (through data collection of their contribution to the on and off-farm production and informal economy) and must account for their role;*
4. *Women must be given their share. Larger shares should be given to support economic empowerment;*
5. *There is an urgency to move towards holistic policies that address women’s productive and reproductive roles;*
6. *The implementation of existing commitments must be monitored, evaluated and reported with regard to rural women’s economic empowerment;*
7. *Empower women as producers to overcome poverty. Men should be their champions for gender equality;*
8. *Women must be supported to become successful entrepreneurs, and need to own land, business, and equipment and get access to training, credit, markets and information;*
9. *Support an agricultural research agenda that focuses on rural women’s needs for agricultural technologies, labour-saving agricultural equipment and modern means of communication;*
10. *Women’s voices must be heard through improved participation in decision-making in local, national, regional and international fora;*
11. *Strengthen women’s role in the society and support women’s leadership in farmer organizations.*

On International Philanthropy Day, 22 February 2010, **ECOSOC Special Event** on “***Engaging Philanthropy to promote Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women***” took place in New York. More than 500 representatives from the private sector, philanthropic institutions, NGOs and academia participated in discussions with Member States and experts from the United Nations system on ending violence against women and girls and promoting the economic empowerment of women through innovative partnerships. Ms. Geena Davis, Academy Award Actor and Founder of *See Jane*, delivered the following key recommendations to the Council:

1. *Engaging all sides and work hand-in-hand with Governments, the United Nations, Philanthropies, the Private Sector, leading individuals and members of other civil society groups;*
2. *Strong leadership is indispensable in both the public and private sectors to promote a culture of respect for women and girls and encourage their leadership potential;*
3. *Legislation to protect, prevent and prosecute those guilty of violence against women and girls is urgently to be stepped up;*
4. *Additional human and financial resources in support of good practices is needed as well as documenting the good practices;*
5. *Investing in girls and empowering them as agents of change is crucial for ending violence against women and girls and promoting their economic empowerment;*
6. *Making long-term commitments to women and girls by giving more through multi-year funding of programmes;*
7. *Involving men and boys in campaigns to end violence against women and in changing attitudes towards women's traditional roles in the household and the economy at large;*
8. *Enhancing women's access to property and economic assets, including agricultural inputs, finance and markets, while initiating legal reform to protect their property and land rights;*
9. *Education and training for women and girls is indispensable for making opportunities viable;*
10. *Implementing decent working conditions, such as labor standards and freedom from harassment.*