

## **Informal Summary**

**2010 Economic and Social Council**

**High-Level Segment**

**Special policy dialogue on “*The role of women in countries in special situations*”**

**Wednesday, 30 June 2010**

**Chair: H.E. Ambassador Octavio Errázuriz**, Vice-President of ECOSOC,  
Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations

### **Opening remarks:**

**Mr. Patrick Hayford**, Director, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, on behalf of  
**Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra**, Under-Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Africa and High  
Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small  
Island Developing States

### **Panellists:**

**Ms. Carla Koppell**, Director of Initiative for Inclusive Security (Moderator)  
**Ms. Leymah Gbowee**, Executive Director, Women in Peace and Security Network Africa  
**Ms. Frances Stewart**, Director of Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and  
Ethnicity, Department for International Development, University of Oxford  
**Mr. Jan Egeland**, Director of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs  
**Ms. Graciana del Castillo**, Senior Research Scholar, Columbia University

### **Key Messages:**

- **Considerable progress has been made at the inter-governmental and regional levels to promote women’s rights and their political and economic empowerment in crisis and post crisis situations, but women’s reality on the ground continues to be one of extreme vulnerability, human rights abuses, and marginalization;**
- **Gender equality and empowerment of women in crisis and post-crisis situations can only be achieved through women’s participation in all stages of peace-making and peace-building, including reconstruction and long-term development;**
- **Mechanisms, institutions and programs promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women can be effective only if they are allocated sufficient financing;**
- **A gender perspective needs to be mainstreamed in all humanitarian and development programs in order to address women’s specific needs in crisis and post-crisis situations, especially security needs;**
- **Improving women’s condition in crisis and post-crisis situations requires an integrated approach in order to exploit potential synergies among different interventions.**

**H.E. Ambassador Octavio Errázuriz**, the Vice-President of ECOSOC, opened the Special Policy Dialogue on “the role of women in countries in special situations”. In his opening remarks, he noted that the Dialogue offers timely and important occasion, which brings together a

panel of international experts to critically examine the impact of the current crises, ranging from climate change and natural disasters to conflict and economic downturn, on women in countries in special situation - such as in Africa, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing states, and post-conflict and post-crisis countries. He noted that women's perspectives were important for advancing development and neglecting these would have serious implications for all our sustainable development priorities.

**Mr. Patrick Hayford**, Director, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, speaking on behalf of **Mr. Cheik Sidi Diarra**, USG, Special Adviser on Africa and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OSAA/OHRLLS), noted that while the important role of women in peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction is now widely recognised in international frameworks, women remain marginalized in the resolution of conflict and in peace processes. He commended the important role of regional organization and in this regard noted that the African Union will launch the Africa Women Decade in October 2010 and has declared 2010 as the Year of Peace. Both events offer an important opportunity to promote the advancement of women in post-conflict situations. He also cited the efforts of the Pacific Islands Forum Regional Security Committee as an important effort to promote peace in the region.

**Ms. Carla Koppell**, Director of Initiative for Inclusive Security, stressed that women's participation in decision-making in crisis and post-crisis situations is critical for three main reasons. First, women are the majority in most post-conflict societies and frequently have suffered disproportionately from war or natural disasters. It is thus their fundamental right to have a voice in post-conflict development so that vulnerabilities and disparities are addressed. Second, it is a legal obligation as there are a myriad of international, regional, and national resolutions, declarations, policy statements, and action plans calling for women's priorities and needs to be addressed and for their inclusion in decision-making. Finally, there is a growing body of evidence confirming that women's marginalization undermines efforts to resolve and rebuild conflict stricken-societies, as it deprives these efforts of their experience, expertise, and perspectives. The inclusion of women in decision-making is also likely to benefit the broader development agenda. Female legislators are more likely to accord greater priority and investments to family health and human welfare and to draw attention to women's core challenges. Greater presence of women in governance can also help rebuild government's legitimacy as they are perceived as less corrupt and more trustworthy given their marginalization.

Women count for the largest number of working poor and are among the poorest of the poor, but also represent the fastest growing economic force. Tapping into women's economic potential can bring extraordinary economic returns. Women's participation in economic activities will not only increase women's well-being but also drive economic revitalization essential to achieving the MDGs as women tend to invest higher percentages of their personal income in family welfare. Ms. Koppell also stressed that women's inclusion in peace processes can tap into their role and authority in local communities, which makes them a critical partner in community reconciliation and rebuilding processes; in facilitating the successful return of combatants to peaceful society; as well as in transitional justice efforts. Despite the rhetorical recognition of women's skills, authority and potential to build bridges within societies and promote development, however, there is still a considerable gap between rhetoric and progress on the ground. Ms. Koppell emphasized that there are a number of specific actions ECOSOC can take to elevate the status of women and attention to their needs in post-conflict development. Among them: addressing legal impediments to women's land ownership, employment, inheritance, banking, and agricultural extension services, as well as promoting the systematic collection of sex disaggregated data to track, monitor and evaluate the implementation of gender sensitive policies.

**Ms. Leymah Gbowee**, Executive Director, Women in Peace and Security Network Africa, welcomed the important progress made in the formal recognition of women's rights through various international and regional instruments. She also pointed out that the implementation of these declarations has not yet translated into women's greater participation in post-conflict processes and prioritization of women's issues. Many countries have yet to achieve the target of 30 per cent of women parliamentarians, which is the first step to resolve women's problems. Limited access to security, justice and education is often the reason for such a lack of progress in women's marginal participation and role in decision-making. Ms. Gbowee also emphasized that the concept of gender issues as cross-cutting has not served the cause of women as well as it has often been used as an excuse for inaction. Moreover, the continuous portrait and stereotyping of women as victims undermines their participation and empowerment, while there is another narrative among women that needs to be emphasized in order to enlarge women's choices and access to a broad range of activities in both the political and economic sphere. In this regard, she called on developed countries to lead by example and expressed the hope that the United States would join CEDAW. She also pointed out that current instruments to protect the rights of women are not backed by resources and accountability mechanisms. Countries should start investing in the implementation of some of the action points of these instruments. Research, consultation, partnership and funding are essential to empowering women, especially in post conflict situations. Financial support should especially target and strengthen local initiatives aimed at enhancing women's participation as the time has come to move beyond rhetoric.

**Ms. Frances Stewart**, Director of the Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, Department for International Development, University of Oxford, stressed that women in crisis and post-crisis situations are too often portrayed only as victims, but they are also agents of change. Women play a very active role in fighting as well as in the economy during the war, taking up roles in agriculture and in the informal sectors that traditionally belong to men. In post-conflict situations, however, although women are actively engaged in the informal peace negotiations, they become invisible once the informal peace-process takes place and often are neither represented nor consulted. Post-conflict political settlements offer more opportunities to incorporate women in political processes, but women tend to be neglected in the economic reconstruction. Economic settlements tend to privilege macro-economic stabilization, pro-market reforms, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) schemes largely targeted to men, and economic infrastructure, neglecting social development and bypassing women in post-conflict economic settlements. Women in deprived groups, such as indigenous women, are the most discriminated in this regard. The formal recognition of a greater role of women in peace-making needs to be extended to post-conflict land settlement, farming assistance, economic opportunities; assets ownership, employment; access to training and to formal sector medium size credits.

**Mr. Jan Egeland**, Director of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, reckoned that despite important breakthroughs in the formal recognition that women's involvement in peace-making and peace-building is a precondition for peace, the reality of women in crisis and post-conflict countries has not changed significantly. Women continue to be extremely vulnerable to human rights abuses and marginalized from all decision-making affecting their lives. It is time to focus on the situation on the ground and identify concrete ways and approaches to tap into women's resourcefulness to improve their conditions. Despite progress made in recent years in humanitarian operations to focus on women's specific needs, there is a need for a systematic integration of gender into humanitarian responses at all levels – policy development, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, needs assessment tools and operational tools and practices. The systematic collection and analysis of sex- and age- disaggregated data, and the integration of

gender perspectives in appeals and planning tools related to disaster preparedness, responses and post-crisis reconstruction and peace-building are critical steps in the right direction. All humanitarian actors must be held accountable to ensure that the different needs of women and men, girls and boys, are taken into account in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of their interventions. Special attention should be paid to the risk of sexual violence. Humanitarian decision-makers should ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to gender programming focused on grassroots operations rather than advocacy. It is time to focus on the implementation of women's political, economic and social rights.

**Ms. Graciana del Castillo**, Senior Research Scholar, Columbia University, focused on the need to draw a distinction between conflict-affected and poverty-affected countries. The former should be considered countries in "special situations", especially when examining women's conditions. These countries face a complex and prolonged transition, which cannot be treated as "development as usual" and in the course of which women's participation and representation vary significantly. In addition to the socio-development challenges normally facing developing countries, post-conflict countries also need to deal with the destruction and disruption of basic services and infrastructure, manage the trauma of war and pave the way for national reconciliation. The time horizon for economic policy planning, guiding principles, technical and financial assistance, and the nature and extent of the international community's involvement in post-conflict countries also differ considerably from development as usual. In post-crisis situations, policy-makers do not have the luxury to plan for the medium to long-term so as to get it right. Political and reconstruction principles generally override development objectives and might often lead to distortions. Post-conflict countries rely heavily on aid to finance a large part of their economic and social needs, as well as needs related to governance, the rule of law and security. The way aid is currently delivered, however, is often ineffective in helping countries achieve these goals as it tends to be too fragmented. In the case of gender, gains in education are often not reinforced by commensurate gains in women's employment. Gender provisions also need to be more broadly supported at the national level to have an impact. National ownership thus continues to be key to the success and sustainability of gender policies.

## Q&A

In the ensuing discussion, a number of delegations requested panellists to elaborate on ways to increase women's participation in the political processes of post-conflict crisis in practice and share best practices in this regard. Some stressed the need for selection of more female Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General and Resident Coordinators as a way to increase the attention to women's issues during peace-processes, especially safety needs. Others underscored the important role of women as agents of change in post-conflict situations and the need to enhance this role by systematically promoting and assessing gender equality. A number of delegations pointed out the additional challenges posed by the current crises on the implementation of the gender objectives, which will require a greater involvement of women in decision-making to ensure that they are not excluded from the economic recovery. In the case of natural disasters, women's participation in disaster preparedness would help improve disaster response. One delegation questioned how women can best be assisted in developing countries, while respecting the principle of national ownership and, in a context of diminishing aid, what should be the priorities for these efforts. Some NGO representatives stressed that the issue of women's reproductive health is central to women's health and development, while others called for the promotion of a human rights-based approach in promoting the achievement of the MDGs, including gender related goals, where education plays a central role to increase people's awareness of their rights and legal empowerment. Many underscored the need for political will to

pursue the implementation of these goals and create incentives for women's participation at all levels of decision-making, including for the provision of basic services. Gender issues should systematically be addressed in the Peacebuilding Commission.

In addressing some of the questions posed by delegations and NGOs, panellists stressed the need to include women in all stages of peace talks in order to tap into their role and expertise, particularly as members of civil society, as well as to ensure that their needs are taken into account in political settlements. Women's problems should be promptly identified and addressed and, in the case of violence, perpetrators should be prosecuted. The appointment of female mediators could be a step in this direction. Women can also play a critical role in conflict prevention as they play an active role in their communities and society. Panellists urged countries to move beyond declarations and policies and focus on implementation, which means allocating resources and monitoring results. On the question of how to increase women's representation and participation, some panellists stressed the need to move beyond laws and conventions and adopt formal measures such as parliamentary quotas. On how to best assist women without interfering with countries' cultural and religious beliefs, panellists pointed out that reducing gender inequality and empowering women is an issue of basic rights.