

**Statement by Mrs Solveiga Silkalna, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of LATVIA, at the High-level Segment of the Economic and Social Council**

New York, 1 July 2010

Mr President,

At the outset let me say that Latvia aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Belgium on behalf of the European Union.

Mr President,

Latvia welcomes the thematic focus on gender equality at the 2010 Annual ministerial reviews during the current High-level segment of the ECOSOC substantive session.

Latvia, as a candidate to ECOSOC in elections later this year, attaches great importance to the pivotal role played by the United Nations in ensuring gender mainstreaming in its activities. We welcome the recent consensus to establish a unified gender entity, which will strengthen the position of gender equality issues on the agenda of the United Nations and its member states.

We believe that 2010 is the last chance to launch a revitalized and truly concerted effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Therefore, we are convinced that the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly in September should focus precisely on the progress and shortfalls in reaching the MDGs.

Mr President,

Every member state can make further progress in reaching the MDGs in the coming years, including my own country.

In many respects Latvia is a positive example of gender equality and women's empowerment, with women constituting, for example, 71% of university graduates, 50% of Supreme Court judges, 45% of employees in research and development. Women have occupied our highest posts of state, including president, speaker of the parliament, ministers of foreign affairs, defence and interior. At the same time, we have to tackle the remaining challenges facing women, notably the risk of poverty. This is particularly important for vulnerable groups such as pensioners, the disabled, single parent families and large families, but also for practically all sectors of society which were affected by the deep economic downturn. We expect that as we begin on the road to economic recovery, the poverty risk will be gradually reduced, especially as employment levels are now beginning to improve.

In recent years, Latvia has been sharing its accumulated experience with other countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Georgia, encouraging women there to become more economically and politically empowered. Gender equality has been an integral principle of Latvia's development cooperation until now, and will certainly continue in our Development Cooperation Policy Platform for 2011-2015, which is currently in preparation.

Thank you, Mr. President.