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**STATEMENT BY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL,
H.E. MR. HAMIDON ALI (MALAYSIA)
AT THE OPENING OF THE FIFTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
1 MARCH 2010**

Mr. Chairperson,
Deputy Secretary-General,
Under-Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Allow me at the outset to express my condolences and deep sympathy to the victims of the earthquake which hit Chile this past weekend.

It is a great honour for me to address the opening of the 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. As has been repeated here and in other fora, this year of 2010 holds significant importance for the issue of gender equality and the empowerment of women. In addition to this particular session of the Commission, the theme of the Economic and Social Council's 2010 Annual Ministerial Review is "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women", and later on in September, we will be reviewing the Millennium Development Goals. Additionally, there is ongoing work taking place with regard to the consolidated gender entity within the System-Wide Coherence discussions. The various events held this year collectively need to send a strong and unified message by all countries to meet the goals and targets set and to ensure that we overcome the barriers that persist in our common pursuit for gender equality and the empowerment of women

This fifty-fourth session of the Commission, as also being the commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing

Declaration and Platform for Action, will undertake a comprehensive review of all aspects of the Platform and of the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly held in 2000. ECOSOC is keenly aware of the special importance of this year's session of the Commission, and I pledge the full support of the Council's Bureau for your efforts during this key year.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted continues to be the global blueprint for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. This Commission has played a key role in its follow-up. The Commission has regularly reviewed progress in the implementation of the Platform's critical areas of concern, provided further policy guidance for action by a range of stakeholders, identified new and emerging challenges and highlighted the gender perspectives of the UN development agenda.

Mr. Chairperson,

The recent economic and financial crisis, the food and fuel crises and the challenges of climate change have a pronounced impact on our efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals including the Millennium Development Goals. Each of these overlapping crises exacerbate existing gender inequalities, threaten the progress made so far, and makes it harder to achieve the practical realization of the equality of women and men.

According to the International Labour Office, the current crisis is expected to have a more negative impact on female unemployment rates than those of men in most regions of the world. Higher unemployment and a loss of household income increases unpaid work, including caregiving, mostly done by women and girls. Women account for nearly two thirds of the nearly 800 million illiterate adults in the world, and illiteracy is particularly prevalent among women who are older, poor, disabled, from ethnic minorities or from rural areas. The increased educational gains of women and girls across the globe do not necessarily translate into improved employment opportunities. MDG 5 on improving maternal mortality is the goal where the least progress is being made.

It is recognized that gender equality is a goal in itself, but also a means towards achieving all the other MDGs and internationally agreed development goals. It is now well understood that the success of policies and programme interventions aimed at eradicating hunger and malnutrition; achieving universal primary education; reducing child mortality; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB; and protecting environmental sustainability will be enhanced when gender equality perspectives are taken into account.

Advances in gender equality will lead to faster development and more robust economies. Implementation of the Platform for Action is therefore not just desirable but essential for achieving the MDGs. No country can develop in a sustainable way without the full and effective participation of women in all aspects of life.

This Commission has a track record of engaging a broad range of stakeholders and in particular representatives from non-governmental organizations and women's groups from all around the globe. These partnerships and strategic alliances between stakeholders have galvanized action at national, regional and global level, and brought results for women, their families and societies.

Mr. Chairperson,

This session of the Commission will directly contribute to the ECOSOC's Annual Ministerial Review this July. The Council will build and further expand on the work of the Commission. The Council has the opportunity to ensure that the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women is centrally anchored within the context of the broader development agenda.

We have the BDPA which unites us all, and the challenge for all states is to prevent political or ideological differences usurping the discourse on the issue of gender equality and the empowerment of women – an issue of vital importance for all countries, and an issue which brings out strong emotions. Our purpose is served best when we focus on the whole spectrum of challenges that affect both developing and developed countries, and not simply choosing individual concerns over others

I wish you every success as you embark on two weeks of rich debate and exchange of experiences, good practices, and consider lessons learned.

Thank you.