

10 November 2006

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the Roundtable to Commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the
Commission on the Status of Women**

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In celebration of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Commission on the Status of Women, I am honored to participate in and chair this round table on the role of the United Nations in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

I would like to begin by extending a warm welcome to the Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Kofi Annan; the President of the ECOSOC, H.E. Ambassador Ali Hachani; the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, H.E. Ambassador Carmen Maria Gallardo; all our distinguished speakers and delegates, as well as all the civil society representatives here today.

Today we recognize the United Nations' unique role in promoting gender equality. This anniversary is an important opportunity to reflect upon the many significant achievements of the Commission; achievements that have not only brought us to where we are today, but have paved the way for our work forward.

It is also an important opportunity to clearly outline the challenges that lie ahead which prevent us from achieving true gender equality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the 2005 World Summit, world leaders affirmed that "Progress for Women is progress for all". They have also endorsed a number of key principles that underline the critical importance of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women within the United Nations system.

Firstly, gender equality is essential to development, peace and security.

Secondly, if we are to achieve gender equality, then we all have a responsibility to mainstream gender policy in all areas.

And thirdly, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other development goals, the Beijing Platform of Action must be implemented in full.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since its establishment in 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women has played a critical role to ensure that gender equality is integrated into all aspects of our work. I would like to highlight two of their most significant achievements so far.

First, the conferences organized by the Commission in Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and Nairobi in 1985 laid the foundation for serious action in gender related issues. This work culminated in 1995 with the historic establishment of a comprehensive global policy framework - better known as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Second, is the General Assembly's adoption of:

the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, and its subsequent strengthening in 1999; and, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, in 1993. These actions are indeed indispensable as they provide a comprehensive framework for action.

Our achievements, however, do not imply that we no longer face challenges. To the contrary, we are in need to ensure that Member States, the United Nations system, civil society and the private sector all work together to implement policies that mainstream gender equality more effectively.

It is sad to note;

- That today, women account for two-thirds of the 1.2 billion people currently living in extreme poverty.
- That almost two-thirds of the world's illiterate are women, especially given the fact that providing education is one of the most effective way to tackle poverty.
- That every year more than half a million women die unnecessarily from complications in pregnancy or child birth.
- And that young, HIV positive women, are nearly ten times more likely to experience violence at the hands of their partners than women who do not have the disease.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last month the Secretary-General issued an in-depth study on violence against women. It concluded that violence against women has yet to receive the priority attention and resources needed at all levels to tackle it effectively.

Member States have welcomed the study and called for the full implementation of its recommendations.

Given the challenges ahead, we all need to do more.

That is why I commend the Secretary-General for urging the High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence to outline recommendations to strengthen gender mainstreaming, particularly in the United Nations operational work.

In the report presented yesterday, the Panel made a compelling case for giving the United Nations a stronger voice and more resources, to focus and enhance its work on gender. This is something we should all welcome and encourage.

I can also assure you that during the Sixty-first Session the General Assembly will continue to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. It will not stop there; to highlight the relevance of these issues, I intend to hold an informal thematic debate on gender in the coming months.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Gender equality is critical to securing sustainable solutions to the challenges facing the work of this Organization; from development and human rights, to peace and security.

On the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Commission, let us all renew our commitment to work together to ensure that gender is given even greater recognition. For without this commitment, we will not be able to make substantial progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and help secure better lives for women all over the world.

Thank you.