

8 March 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the Informal Thematic Debate of the General Assembly on Gender
Equality and the Empowerment of Women**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come to the end of a very productive and stimulating debate on, "Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women."

I would like to thank all the speakers for their insightful interventions.

I would also like to recognise the relentless efforts that NGOs and women's groups have made to increase the visibility of these issues and to promote gender equality, including at the United Nations.

During the debates, we have been reminded that without gender equality, and respect for women's human rights, we will not make progress in peace and security. But also, that without the empowerment of women, we will not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

We also heard that there has been groundbreaking progress in many countries.

Many delegations referred to their gender equality action plans to promote women's economic and human rights. And many, reported concrete progress in increasing women's political participation, in both the public and private sectors.

Our discussions have highlighted the importance of a two-track approach to achieve gender equality and women's economic and political empowerment.

First, gender equality needs to be mainstreamed in legislation, national budgets and in macro-economic and social policies.

And second, targeted interventions, such as quotas for political representation are needed to support women. In particular, we have heard about the powerful role that microfinance can play in empowering women economically and socially.

However, though we have made progress in many areas, we must not forget the scale of the challenges that lie ahead.

If we are to achieve gender equality in the 21st century, we must intensify our collective efforts.

We have a collective duty to ensure that women and girls, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, also have the opportunity to development to their fullest potential.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is hope in small gestures.

In a video presentation during the Panel discussion yesterday, we saw what just 10 dollars had done for the economic situation, and the human dignity of a young Bangladeshi woman.

There were many other examples of the positive impact of micro-credit in the lives of the poorest and the most vulnerable women, in different parts of the world.

We have heard from many participants that gender equality has moved forward most quickly when it has been part of the advancement of broader human rights.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said; that universal human rights begin in small places, close to home.

During the past three days, we have heard many demands from participants to strengthen the role the United Nations play to uplift women.

Many consider the current gender structures to be too weak to cope with the scale and urgency of the issues we face today.

We should be open to any options that can give the systematic and sustained attention needed to achieve the standards set out in the United Nations Charter, the Millennium Development Goals, CEDAW and in the Beijing Platform.

Many participants endorsed the recommendations that have been put forward by the High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence.

I would encourage Member States to consider these recommendations, in due course, in a positive and constructive manner.

This organisation's biggest constituency is of course - women.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen

However much we can learn from best practises and the challenges that have been overcome, the real issue lies in the area of implementation.

We all stand to gain from women and men having equal opportunities.

We must move beyond words and deliver on the promises that we have made.

The promises that governments have, so far, made to eliminate all discrimination against women, need to be realized.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we are to achieve the changes that we all want to see, I can think of no better motto than something the great Mahatma Gandhi once said; "Be the change that you want to see in the world". There is no other cause that we can commit ourselves to, that can have such an impact, on the lives of so many.

That can renew our hope and optimism, for a better world, where all women have equality of opportunity, to pursue their dreams, and to claim their rights.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will shortly circulate to all of you a summary of the very productive discussions we had during this informal thematic debate, highlighting the progress we have achieved so far, as well as the challenges that remain ahead of us.

I would like to thank you very much for your attention and for your participation over the last three days.

This informal thematic debate on gender equality is now adjourned.