

14 May 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,  
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Conference “A Step Forward, The Millennium Development  
Goals” organized by Women Together**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank Women Together, in particular Mrs. Joana Caparros for inviting me to participate today, to discuss gender equality and the empowerment of women, the third Millennium Development Goal.

We live in an era of unprecedented global change and rising prosperity. But not everyone has equal access to the new opportunities. Sharp inequalities continue to persist.

The international community responded to these disparities at the historic Millennium Summit at the United Nations in New York in 2000. World leaders jointly pledged to fight poverty and hunger, to tackle gender inequality, environmental degradation, and HIV/AIDS. They also committed to improve access to education, health care and clean water. The target to achieve these commitments - the eight Millennium Development Goals – was set for 2015.

These goals, which were reaffirmed at the World Summit in 2005, have mobilized governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations, like you, around achieving the development targets by specific deadlines.

The Goals are mutually reinforcing: progress towards one affects the progress of the others. Every single Goal is directly related to women's rights - Goal 3 of the MDGs. This goal challenges discrimination against women, and seeks to ensure that girls as well as boys have the chance to go to school.

Indicators linked to this goal aim to measure progress towards ensuring that more women become literate, have more voice and representation in public policy and decision making, and have improved job prospects.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In March this year the General Assembly held a thematic debate devoted to gender equality and the empowerment of women. It had a special focus on the role that microfinance could play in empowering women socially and economically.

Experience from Asia, Latin America, and Africa, has demonstrated that when women are given the chance to succeed through small business loans or increased educational opportunities; families are stronger, economies are stronger, and communities flourish.

So far, 13 million micro entrepreneurs worldwide have benefited from micro finance, using their loans to increase their income and lift their families out of poverty. But there remain 200 million families who do not have access to affordable credit.

It is important to recognize, however that micro-credit schemes constitute only one poverty alleviation strategy.

This is where the role of governments come in. They play a crucial role in incorporating gender perspectives in their fiscal and monetary policies. Gender-sensitive policies assist women entrepreneurs in accessing markets and obtaining reasonable interest rates for loans, as well as promote decent employment opportunities, fair taxation, and investments in infrastructure.

The Internet can also help. So we must also tap into the information and communications technologies that offer immense opportunities for reducing poverty, giving women a voice and advancing gender equality.

Distinguished Guests,

I would like to conclude by commending the micro-credit and textile projects that Women Together run to help women rise out of poverty and become more self-sufficient.

The task of ending extreme poverty is a collective one – for you as well as for me. The end of poverty will require a global network of cooperation among people and organization – public and private sector as well as NGOs.

I trust that the Award Ceremony and Fashion Show tonight will be a great success.

Thank you.