

30 May 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,  
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Press Conference at the United Nations Office at Vienna**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here in the beautiful city of Vienna. I am here to attend the International Conference on Women Leaders – Networking for Peace and Security in the Middle East, chaired by HE Dr. Ursula Plassnik. As the President of the General Assembly, I am visiting the UN Headquarters in Vienna as well as UN agencies based here. My visit includes holding bilateral meetings with officials in the Austrian Government.

I would like to briefly highlight some of what we have achieved during the 61st Session and what we are presently working on.

In September 2006, a global strategy to counter terrorism was launched. The strategy marks the first time that Member States agree to a common strategic approach to fight terrorism. Since then we have held several briefings to Member States on the implementation of the Strategy.

We also adopted by consensus the resolution on the Strengthening of the Economic and Social Council. This took place after almost 14 months of negotiations. The resolution will now regularly convene a new Development Cooperation Forum, and respond more quickly to humanitarian emergencies.

On the level of codification of International Law, the Assembly adopted in December 2006 two landmark conventions; the Convention on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, and the declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. By these two important instruments, all Member States are committed to promoting and protecting the human rights, freedoms and dignity of all persons with disabilities, as well as help prevent enforced disappearances and provide "justice" for the victims and their families.

The 61st session of the General Assembly also witnessed the election of Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon. Over the past few months, I have developed a close working relationship with him to better align Member States' interests with that of the UN and deliver more effectively on the shared programme of work.

On the Management and Secretariat reform, I am very proud that we have succeeded in adopting a new system for the Administration of Justice in April 2007. This resolution was of particular importance to me, as it addressed the many major concerns conveyed to me by the Staff of the

United Nations. There is still along way to go on developing this new independent, transparent, professional and adequately resourced System for the 55,000 staff of the UN Secretariat, Funds and Programmes.

We have also adopted a new Scale of Assessment for 2007-2009. Furthermore we have adopted the Capital Master Plan, which means that preparation to renovate the UN Headquarters complex in New York can begin.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As part of revitalizing the General Assembly, I am very proud to inform you that the GA, for the first time, held 3 informal thematic debates on issues of concern to the entire membership. These high level meetings brought together Member States, Civil Society, NGOs and in some cases Private Sector. These were:

The First was held on 27 November 2006 entitled "Partnerships towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals: Taking stock, moving forward". The objective of the debate was to give impetus to the implementation of MDGs, by providing a forum to examine practical measures and strategies that would lead to tangible results.

The debate brought together donor and recipient countries as well as civil society as well as entities from non-governmental organizations and the private sector, who shared their successful experiences and new approaches.

The debate was a platform to announce a 10 billion dollar fund by the Islamic Bank for the eradication of poverty.

A follow-up meeting to the debate scheduled to take place in Doha, Qatar on 17 and 18 June 2007.

The second informal debate was on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The debate took place on 7 and 8 March 2007. The debate provided an opportunity to share views on actions, best practices and lessons learned in the promotion of gender equality; to discuss how to bridge the gaps between policy and practice; and, to renew political commitments towards full implementation of existing agreements. The meeting included two interactive panel discussions.

The first focused on the role of women in decision-making at all levels and the second panel on the economic empowerment of women, with a particular focus on micro-finance.

The thematic debate was a great success with more than 80 speakers in the debate, including more than 28 Ministers and high level officials from around the world.

The third informal thematic debate of the General Assembly was entitled “Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace: obstacles and opportunities”. This was held on 10 and 11 May 2007. The objective of the event was to explore the reasons behind the growing level of mistrust between people of different religions and cultures and to examine how and why cultural and religious differences increasingly fuel, and are used to justify, conflicts. A number of prominent commentators, academics and political figures participated in four separate panel discussions for a period of two days, reflecting on many aspects of the subject matter.

Member States received these debates with great enthusiasm and have requested us to hold a fourth thematic debate on climate change which we are in the process of preparing to take place in the second half of July.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have still to conclude discussions on several important issues, such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism; as well as important UN reform issues such as Security Council Reform, System Wide Coherence, Revitalization of the General Assembly and Mandate Review.

So we still have a lot on our plate.

I thank you, and welcome your questions.