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**PANEL III**

**CSW Interactive Discussion on**

**“Presentation of the Review and Appraisal Processes at Regional Level:  
Achievements, Gaps and Challenges”**

**Written statement\* submitted by**

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\* The paper has been reproduced as submitted.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to bring the perspective of the UNECE region to the global review of achievements, gaps and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. This Special session of the CSW is an excellent opportunity to build synergies between regional and global processes and benefit from the exchange of good practices worldwide. In this context I would like to thank the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Division for the Advancement of Women for their support and excellent cooperation with the UNECE secretariat.

The number of delegations, both from member States and international organizations, as well as the large presence NGOs participating in this meeting is a clear demonstration of the concern for a thorough global review of the implementation of commitments taken in Beijing. It also expresses the willingness both at policy levels and within civil society to identify areas where more efforts are needed.

This spirit was very much seen also at the 10-year Review meeting for the ECE region, held in Geneva on 14-15 December 2004. The meeting gathered over 600 participants from 53 member countries. It was organized in cooperation with key international partners also active on gender equality issues in the ECE region. I would like to thank these organizations, namely UNDP, UNIFEM, the Council of Europe, OSCE and the European Commission for their support to this meeting, in terms of substance or in financing the participation of governmental representatives and of NGOs from countries with transition economies. I thank also the governments of Switzerland and Germany, which have financially supported the Meeting, and the participation of representatives from economies in transition.

Our Beijing +10 meeting was a third milestone related to the Beijing process in the UNECE region, which came after the UNECE Preparatory Meeting in Vienna, 1994, and the Beijing +5 Meeting in Geneva, January 2000. The later meeting established an excellent model of cooperation at the regional level between civil society, governments, and international organizations. Furthermore, the agreed conclusions of the Beijing +5 event provided a useful framework to undertake specific actions in priority areas of concern in the region.

The 10-year Review meeting for the UNECE region, chaired by Canada, reaffirmed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and stressed the importance of its full implementation. The meeting evaluated progress and identified challenges and areas requiring intensified efforts. Its results are reflected in the Chairperson's conclusions, which are annexed to the report of the Meeting. An addendum to the same report includes the conclusions of the NGO Forum, which was held two days prior to the Governmental meeting.

The Review recognized great diversity, which is a basic feature of our region gathering countries from North America, western and Eastern Europe as well as CIS. In general terms, while progress was made by most developed market economies, where women's position has

improved, a deterioration of women's position was observed in many countries with transition economies.

These mixed results can be observed in a number of areas. **Women's poverty** is still a concern in the region, especially in South-Eastern Europe, in some countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus. It should be stressed that women's poverty reflects systemic disadvantages and in most countries, women are at higher risk to become poor, especially single mothers and older women. **Women's access to decision-making positions** has generally improved. However, in a number of countries traditional views on women's role are resurging affecting these gains. Positive developments in the field of **women's health** were noted, although the rapid spread of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS and the raise in maternal mortality rates in a number of countries constitute worrying trends and call for progressive legislation and actions. **Violence against women and girls**, including domestic violence is still a serious and widespread problem across the UNECE region.

Beyond uneven progress, all countries share similar areas of concern and similar problems in promoting gender equality. These concerns were discussed more in depth along three main themes of our conference, that is: **women and economy, institutional mechanisms** for gender equality, and **trafficking** in the context of migration.

I would like now to highlight key issues challenges related to these themes and some of good practices, which were identified.

#### *Women and economy*

Improvement in women's employability was seen in most countries in North America and in Western Europe as a result of a better legislative framework, and the introduction of new policies and measures, especially to improve employability and help women combine work with family responsibilities.

Nevertheless, the situation in Eastern Europe and CIS illustrates the fragility of women's economic position in times of crisis. Women's employment opportunities declined drastically and shifted towards lower paid jobs with few or no social benefits, often in informal sector. These tend to be jobs for which women are overqualified. Reversing these negative trends is a priority.

Among challenges, which were identified in the area of employment are elimination of *de facto* discrimination against women in access to resources, hiring and career development, closing the wage gap, improving the quality of women's jobs, removing disadvantages of part-time employment and recognizing paid and unpaid work as essential to economy.

To address pay gaps and employment discrimination several countries used such tools as surveys, reviews, audits, training and other mechanisms to apply, enforce, and monitor their commitments. Trade unions, equal opportunities commissions and employer organizations were involved in many of these initiatives.

Good practices also included efforts to promote women's self-employment and employment in the new technologies sectors. Support to women's entrepreneurship focused on development of micro-credit schemes, women's business centres and meeting the needs of groups of women who face particular disadvantages in the labour market, including indigenous women. These initiatives play a role in empowering women to support themselves economically as well as contributing to their participation in the political and social spheres. Strengthening these types of initiatives, was considered particularly important for some sub-regions, such as South Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

To better recognize the importance of care giving and to support the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, member States initiated innovative pilot studies, experiments and policies in areas such as flexible working hours, new forms of child care, small-scale businesses in care for children and for the elderly and designing more comprehensive approaches to early learning and care in the context of family, education and labour market policy.

While progress in mainstreaming gender in employment policy in a number of countries in the UNECE region is encouraging, gender equality has only been a marginal concern in welfare reforms, an important arena for policy reforms throughout the UNECE region over the last decade. Pension reforms have particularly weakened the position of low-income women and businesses providing pensions are allowed to discriminate by gender in many countries in the region.

Integrating women's unpaid work experiences and mainstreaming gender concerns into welfare reforms in the UNECE region where identified as another key challenges in the area of economy. Some of good practices in this area include removing obstacles to the use of family benefits by fathers as well as new and/or expanded ways of taking care giving into account in policy areas such as income supplements, maternity and parental benefits and pension and taxation credits.

Progress in effective mainstreaming gender into economic decision making across the region, in both government and business, requires **more research** and developing **a regional network of men and women economists** to work on gender-sensitive economic policy, **development of gender disaggregated data**, but also **more dialogue with policy makers and exchange of good practices**.

#### *Institutional mechanisms*

Despite considerable progress in legislation over the past ten years there is still much to be done to improve these mechanisms. They suffer from **limited resources, isolation from line ministries, and instability related to political changes**. This is especially relevant to countries in central Asia and the Caucasus, which established national machineries in late 1990s. Many of these countries referred to the importance of developing government plans of action for achieving gender equality. Also, in most countries legal gains still have to be translated into de facto gender equality achievements in most countries in the UNECE region.

In several countries, new types of mechanisms were developed, such as equal opportunities commissions, ombudspersons, parliamentary committees, independent audit committees to assess progress in gender equality policies in all ministries and centres for gender studies, in order to strengthen the institutional capacity to advance equality. Gender budgeting initiatives were also developed by governments and NGOs as another tool for accountability. Many of these initiatives are still in the pilot phase and should be further developed.

Many countries cited new or enhanced forms of cooperation among stakeholders, such as discussing the future development of gender equality policy with women's organizations, political parties, trade unions, the media, and academics. Some of these efforts also served to raise public awareness and generate policy discussions of gender equality issues. Others helped to improve understanding and gender analysis capacity among government officials at all levels as well as in the private sector and civil society. Some countries have also taken measures to increase women's participation on boards of large corporations and launched initiatives related to social corporate responsibility.

Another area where there were significant new developments is statistics and indicators. These initiatives included setting up a gender statistics section within the government statistical agency, improving the collection and use of statistics disaggregated by sex and developing indicators on specific equality issues such as employment, reconciliation of work and family as well as on beneficiaries of programmes and policies.

#### *Trafficking in the context of migration*

The continually high number of women being trafficked over the past decade is of growing concern to most countries. Many of these women are trafficked from Eastern Europe and CIS to North America and especially Western Europe. This increase is closely related to the rise in organized crime, inadequate anti-trafficking legislation, as well as changes on the supply side (deterioration of women's economic status) and the demand side (a booming of sex industry along with more demand for household help, another potential source of sexual exploitation).

More attention is required to address the human rights abuses and the root causes of trafficking, including economic causes, in women and girls, in all countries and to ensure that anti-trafficking strategies have a holistic and multi-disciplinary approach.

Good practices in combating trafficking include improvement of legislation and criminalizing trafficking, awareness campaigns, help-lines, shelters and assistance programme. There are several examples of countries having improved coordination and collaboration across different ministries responsible for issues such as labour, justice, immigration and foreign affairs to more comprehensively address the many dimensions of trafficking. Lessons learned include the importance of meeting the particular needs of migrant women and collaboration of women's organizations and other civil society partners.

#### *Broader economic and political context*

These challenges have to be seen in a broader context, both at the economic and the political levels. In the economic sphere, globalization and regional integration create an obligation to make UNECE economies more competitive. To reach the goal of improved competitiveness while maintaining social cohesion and reducing poverty, countries and groups of countries have to take new approaches in economic thinking and policies but also in reforms of social protection. Incorporating a gender perspective into these policies is essential.

More generally I would like to underline that **without aligning economic and social issues with a gender perspective, a number of commitments taken at Beijing will be seriously at risk**. Similarly, without **rethinking institutional frameworks and policies** which are still based on the man as breadwinner and do not take into consideration the relationship between paid and unpaid work, the objective of women's economic and social empowerment can be hampered.

In the political and institutional sphere, the 10-year review takes place in a situation of continued instability in a number of new democracies within the UNECE region, affected by conflicts and post-conflict situations, massive migratory movements between and within countries, hundreds of thousands of displaced people, and the growing threat of terrorism. It also takes place in a **new geopolitical situation** reflecting the EU expansion to include 10 new member countries. This creates new opportunities, but also raises threats of new dividing lines between EU and non-EU members.

#### *UNECE activities*

Against this overall background the UNECE has a special function to assume as it provides a region-wide platform for the follow up to the Beijing process. The outcomes of regional Beijing +5 and Beijing +10 meetings provide a useful road map for member states in various areas. Considering its economic profile and expertise, the UNECE is well positioned to play this role especially in mainstreaming gender into economic policy making and strategies.

In addition to this catalytic role, UNECE has developed a number of gender-related activities, which correspond to its mandated areas of work. This includes forums and meetings on **women's entrepreneurship**, the development of **gender statistics** and the creation of a website in this area, as well as **policy analysis work**. Concerning the latter, the *Economic Survey of Europe* regularly reviews trends on women in the labour market and a **Regional Symposium on mainstreaming gender into economic policies** was organized jointly with The Office of the Special Adviser and the Division of the Advancement of Women in January 2004.

UNECE has made progress in mainstreaming gender into its activities and is continuing to do so. The 1997 reform of the UNECE confirmed this direction by considering gender mainstreaming as a concern, which should cut across all its activities. The framework for gender mainstreaming within the UNECE was adopted in 2001 by senior management. We will continue to work with our intergovernmental/sectoral bodies to encourage them to include gender concerns into their programme of work. We would also continue to promote the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the UNECE region.

However, promoting gender mainstreaming into ECE activities is facing resources' constraints which constitutes a limiting factor to our continued efforts in this direction. It has also to be noted that mainstreaming gender into ECE activities is a long-term process as it involves cultural changes which have to take place in all the sectoral areas covered by the UNECE.

*Importance of regional and inter-regional cooperation*

In concluding let me stress **the importance of regional cooperation** in efficiently assisting member countries in the implementation of the Beijing commitments. Such cooperation has been proven in our regional Beijing process and should be strengthened. It is also crucial for advancing internationally agreed —upon poverty reduction and development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration.

Equally important is **cooperation among regional commissions**. Close cooperation between UNECE and ESCAP within the framework of the Special Programme for Central Asia (SPECA) is an excellent opportunity to strengthen inter- regional cooperation on gender issues. The forthcoming meeting of SPECA in Astana, hosted by the Government of Kazakhstan, will include a round table on gender and economy. Also excellent collaboration among all regional commissions during the WSIS process could serve as a platform to bring gender concerns to this process. A joint event of regional commissions at WSIS —Tunis could be used to mainstream gender issues into the ICT debate promoted by the regional commissions.

In closing let me take this opportunity to congratulate once again **Ms. Rachel N. Mayanja** for her recent appointment by the Secretary General as Special Adviser for Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women and to say that I am looking forward to cooperate with her office.

I wish you every success in this meeting