



United Kingdom Mission
to the United Nations
New York

One Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza
(885 Second Avenue)
New York, NY 10017

Mailing Address:
PO Box 5238
New York, NY 10150-5238

Telephone: (212) 745-9200
Fax: (212) 745-9316

E-mail: uk@un.int

*SPEECH BY THE RT HON HARRIET HARMAN, QC MP, UNITED KINGDOM
MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITY AT THE OPENING OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN*

Thank you. It is an honour to address this Commission on the Status of Women.

Today, we are all thinking of the people of Chile who are suffering from the earthquake and our thoughts are with them and remain with the people of Haiti.

The UK supports the statement made earlier by Spain on behalf of the European Union, particularly continuing to make determined progress towards the Beijing objectives. And as Bibiana Aido said, we are working to bring our economies out of recession.

As UK minister for women I have 3 priorities

- To help women balance their work and family commitments
- To prevent violence against women – particularly domestic violence and
- To increase the representation of women in our democracy

We have made progress on all of these – and they will be further strengthened when the UK's new Equality Bill becomes law.

Now is an important moment, not just to discuss progress but to seize the opportunity to take a great step forward by establishing our new UN women's agency.

- We agree about the goals set out in the Beijing Declaration.
- And last September's UN Resolution agreed to bring together the 4 parts of the UN's work on women into one single, coherent and effective UN women's agency.
- There are now women in parliaments and governments in every continent and in most countries in the world

We all draw strength from each other because even though we are making progress in our own countries we are still pioneers in political systems which remain largely the domain of men.

The new UN women's agency will be most important where the challenge is greatest – where women in governments and parliaments are struggling to protect women from poverty and conflict and to improve maternal health, education, and economic opportunity.

When I meet my sisters in the Parliaments of Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania – as I have over the years –

- I admire their determination,
- I see their progress
- and I believe that they are the best hope for the women in their countries.

The new UN women's agency will back them up in their work. It will back us all up in our work.

But to make the progress we all want to see on this new UN women's agency, we have some obstacles to overcome.

- We have to reach agreement promptly so we don't lose the momentum of the September resolution
- We have to counter false arguments that this is an imposition from the North on the South. It is not, it's for women and it's for women everywhere.
- We have to make sure that this new UN women's agency is not held back because of our desire to make progress across the piece. System wide coherence - as it is called - is important. But women will not forgive us if we let "the best be the enemy of the good." We must make progress on system-side coherence but we must not let it hold up the establishment of the new UN women's Agency.

There are issues which -- with political will -- can all be agreed. About accountability, about governance, finance and leadership. Women across the world will look to this agency and it will inspire them to see it headed by a woman. And it will inspire them too, if it was a woman from the South.

Women are counting on us not just to talk this week but to make progress.

It will be important for all women in every country, in every continent. But it's essential for the UN too. It will show that the progress and change for women in all our countries is mirrored by progress and change in the UN. The creation of the new UN women's Agency will be a testament to the UN's commitment to women and recognition that empowering women is essential for development. It will send a powerful signal to women struggling against the odds that the UN is on their side.

Let us make this a historic Commission on the Status of Women. Let us make this the year that we create our new powerful UN women's agency

- to back up women throughout the world
- and to make progress on all the goals we have struggled for, for so long.

Thank you