

Opening statement
by
Ms. Rachel Mayanja
Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
at the
Thirty-fifth Session of the
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Distinguished experts of the Committee
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and privilege to address you at the opening of the thirty-fifth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Since your last meeting, intense negotiations and activity have focused on follow-up to the 2005 World Summit and furthering reform of the United Nations. Allow me to briefly review some of these and their implications for gender equality and women's human rights.

Let me start with developments in the field of human rights. We have witnessed the creation of a new body, the **Human Rights Council**, which will truly make human rights one of the pillars of the work of the United Nations. The first election of the members of the Human Rights Council by the General Assembly was held last week, on 9 May 2006. The inaugural session of this new body, consisting of 47 members, is scheduled to take place on 19 June. Women's human rights had received significant attention in the agenda and work of the Commission on Human Rights, and women expect as a minimum a comparable degree of attention from the new Council. My Office and the Division for the Advancement of Women will continue to work with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to strengthen attention of the Council to the human rights of women and to the gender perspectives and in its work. We will also ensure that the interaction between this Committee and the Council builds on the practice developed over a number of years with its predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights.

During your last session, you met with the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the question of treaty body reform, and the High Commissioner's concept paper on a unified standing treaty body was the subject of reflection at your informal meeting in **Berlin** earlier this month. I understand that you had very in-depth exchanges and will be contributing further to this challenging discussion about how best to enhance the enjoyment of human rights by all rights-holders through effective treaty implementation at the national level. Several experts of your Committee will participate in the fifth Inter-Committee Meeting where the question of treaty body reform will be an important part of your agenda. I stand ready to support you in any way I can in this challenging task.

Distinguished experts,

One of the first outcomes of the reform process has been the establishment, by the General Assembly on 20 December 2005, of a **Peacebuilding Commission**. My Office worked closely with different stakeholders to ensure that the resolution establishing the Peacebuilding Commission reaffirmed the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, and the importance of women's equal participation in decision-making in matters of war and peace. We advocated that the gender perspective be reflected, not only in the mandate but also in the day-to-day work of the Commission. We proposed as well, the establishment of a post of Gender Adviser, at a senior level, as part of the new Peacebuilding Support Office within the United Nations Secretariat. The General Assembly subsequently requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the Support Office be equipped with the "necessary gender competence" to support the Peacebuilding Commission in integrating a gender perspective in its work. My Office will continue to monitor progress and serve as catalyst so that the requisite expertise is indeed included in the Support Office to benefit the work of the Commission.

As part of the **on-going reform process**, the United Nations is squarely addressing the critical challenge of enhancing system-wide coherence and coordination. In regard to gender equality, I wish to flag the following.

My Office is contributing to the work of the **High-level Panel on United Nations system-wide coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment**. This panel, which was established in February by the Secretary-General pursuant to the 2005 World Summit, is composed of 15 members and is co-chaired by three Prime Ministers: Ms. Luisa Dias Diogo of Mozambique, Mr. Jens Stoltenberg of Norway and Mr. Shaukat Aziz of Pakistan (in addition to Ms Diogo, two more women, Ruth Jacoby, and Josette S. Shiner, serve on the Panel). The Panel's task is to explore how the United Nations system could work more coherently and effectively in the three areas.

Based on his own assessment that there is a need to address the gaps and challenges remaining in the field of gender equality and empowerment of women, and to improve outcomes (see the report "Mandating and delivering: analysis and recommendations to facilitate the review of mandates", A/60/733), the Secretary-General has asked the High-level Panel to include in its work an assessment of how gender equality, including through gender mainstreaming, can be addressed better and more fully in the work of the Organization, particularly in its operational activities at country level. This review, within the framework of system-wide coherence, will be particularly critical at the level of implementation of existing standards and policies on gender equality, and should thus contribute to overcoming persistent gaps and challenges.

The high-level panel held a first meeting in April and will meet again in June. Individual members are meeting with various stakeholders so as to provide opportunity for broad-based inputs to their deliberations. The Panel is expected to complete its work

by the summer, to allow for formal presentation of its recommendations to the next session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2006.

Another Summit recommendation called for a review of all **mandates** of the United Nations Secretariat that are more than five years old. This review, facilitated by the report of the Secretary-General I mentioned earlier, is currently under way in the General Assembly and aims to refine the Organization's focus and renew its objectives. Discussion of the manner in which gender equality and the empowerment of women are currently considered in intergovernmental fora is part of this review, and the General Assembly will conduct informal consultations on this part of the mandate review on 17 May.

Also in follow-up to the Summit, the Secretary-General has requested all United Nations entities to take further steps to strengthen their gender mainstreaming. In response to this request, I have spearheaded an effort of the **Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality**, which I chair, composed of the gender focal points of United Nations offices, specialized agencies, funds and programmes, to develop a system-wide policy on gender equality and a system-wide strategy on gender mainstreaming. We believe that a clear framework is necessary, and a common policy of the UN system will undoubtedly strengthen entity-specific gender equality policies, strategies, and action plans and contribute to enhanced coherence in the whole UN system. The system-wide policy on gender equality is currently under preparation and will be presented to the Economic and Social Council at its July 2006 session. Important elements of the system-wide gender mainstreaming strategy include training, accountability, results-based management, monitoring and evaluation, resources allocation, capacity building and coherence and coordination.

I wish to emphasize that this renewed effort of the United Nations system to strengthen attention to gender equality and the use of the gender mainstreaming strategy has the full backing and support of the Heads of the United Nations system. In fact, I had the opportunity to brief **the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB)** on the issues involved, and to draw attention to the responsibility of agency heads to achieve further progress in gender mainstreaming. The CEB will continue to discuss gender mainstreaming at its next session, in the fall of 2006.

Distinguished experts,

These are times of intensive reform and change in the United Nations, and gender equality receives significant attention. Different proposals have been made about how best to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, including women's enjoyment of their human rights. You have been most directly involved in the reform discussion concerning the human rights treaty bodies, including the proposal by the High Commissioner for Human Rights concerning a standing unified treaty body, as well as a possible servicing of this Committee by the Office of the High Commissioner. You have also heard about various suggestions for institutional structures to give enhanced

visibility and influence to gender equality issues. I am at this Committee's disposal for any further discussion of these issues you may wish to hold in the course of your session.

Let me thank your Committee for your strong commitment to gender equality. I wish you success in your deliberations during the next three weeks and pledge the full support of my Office in facilitating your tasks.

Thank you.
