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Statement
by
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at the
Fifty-first Session of the
Commission on the Status of Women
New York, 28 February 2007

Mme. Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and friends,

It is an honour and a privilege to welcome the distinguished members and observers of the Commission. Madam Chairperson, may I congratulate you and all the members of the Bureau for your valuable intersessional work, especially in preparing for this session. I am confident that your able leadership will guide the deliberations of the Commission to a productive conclusion.

The past twelve months saw many strategic entry points for moving onto centre stage in the global arenas on implementation and partnership focused on gender issues.

Nowhere was this better illustrated than at the 2006 substantive session of ECOSOC where three out of four segments took gender equality issues into account. The High-level Roundtable on “Innovation at work: national strategies to achieve gender equality in employment” provided a solid preparation for the high-level segment, and the Ministerial Declaration emanating from it reaffirmed Member States’ determination to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, recognizing them as critical to achieving sustainable development and to efforts to combat hunger, poverty and disease. The humanitarian segment discussed various dimensions of gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies and the “general segment” took up gender mainstreaming and advancement of women.

Two major trends from last year’s activities may be identified. First, continued mobilization of the international community behind gender equality goals and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2005 Summit Outcome, and second, fresh efforts to strengthen UN effectiveness in meeting challenges facing world’s women, primarily by enhancing the links between the policy outcomes and operational work to increase impact on the ground.

Last year, the General Assembly adopted a set of far-reaching resolutions calling for concrete action by Member States and the United Nations, including on follow-up to

the development outcome of the 2005 World Summit,¹ strengthening of ECOSOC,² intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women³, addressing gender based violence in humanitarian emergencies⁴ and trafficking in women and girls.⁵

The High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development and the High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS confirmed that women are disproportionately affected by gender biases in migration and HIV/AIDS and recognized that eliminating gender inequalities and gender-based violence is critical to responding to these challenges.

The 2006 Millennium Development Goals Report shows that poverty, persisting educational gap, under-representation of women and girls in decision-making, gender-wage gap, unacceptably high maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS are common issues facing women across the globe. To meet these challenges, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment should be operationalized through field oriented activities. One of such strategies was adopted by the 2006 Global Microcredit Summit to lift half a billion people out of extreme poverty by providing 175 million of the world's poorest families, especially the women with microcredit.

In the area of women's human rights, further progress has been made at national level by States parties to the CEDAW Convention. During its last year's sessions, the CEDAW Committee was impressed by the significant number of new laws, such as comprehensive gender equality laws, equal treatment laws or laws on domestic violence. Progress was also made in the ratification of both the CEDAW Convention and the Optional Protocol. Since the last session of the Commission, the number of States parties to the Convention has increased by two, with the ratification by Cook Islands and Montenegro, bringing the total number of States parties to 185. Four Member States have become party to the Optional Protocol, namely: Armenia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and the Republic of Korea, bringing the number of States parties to 83. My heartfelt congratulations go to all these Member States.

But our satisfaction with progress should not distract our attention from the many challenges that remain. This morning, I wish to address some of these challenges, including the continuing discrimination against the girl child, violence against girls and women, women and peace and low representation of women in decision making.

Discrimination and violence against the girl child, which is the priority theme of this session, has very real and very harmful effects and impedes the pursuits of equality, development and peace. Girl children are doubly-discriminated against – both because of their sex and because they are children. The barriers which girls face require to be broken down in order to empower girls and to end the cycle of discrimination and violence against them.

¹ A/RES/60/265, para. 31

² A/RES/61/16

³ A/RES/61/143

⁴ "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations", (A/RES/61/134)

⁵ "Improving the coordination efforts against trafficking in persons" (A/RES/61/144)

Regrettably, according to the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women presented to the General Assembly in October 2006, violence against women and girls persists and deepens in most countries of the world. The study seeks to strengthen political commitment and accountability and ensure a more sustained and effective implementation of State obligations to address all forms of violence against women. An inter-agency task force on violence against women, co-convened by DAW and UNFPA, established in February 2006, is coordinating UN system-wide activities to ensure a more systematic response to General Assembly resolution 61/143 on violence against women.

Similar concerns were expressed by the Security Council about the pervasiveness of all forms of violence against women in armed conflict during its open debate in October 2006 on the theme "The roles of women in the consolidation of peace". The Council had before it a report of the Secretary-General⁶, containing a first review of the implementation of the System-wide Action Plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) carried out by my Office. The report provided a candid assessment of achievements and shortcomings in the implementation and contains a series of actionable recommendations to make the Plan a more effective tool and enhance accountability. This will be done, in full consultation with participating UN entities, in the context of the on-going updating of the Plan for 2008-2009.

In addition to interagency coordination in this area, we are focusing on national implementation of the resolution. In a number of its presidential statements⁷, the Security Council called on Member States to develop national action plans on implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). To date, only a few countries, mostly developed ones, have such plans. With the financial help of Norway, my Office is launching a national implementation campaign to mobilize governments towards development of national action plans. The objective is to develop capacities within governments, including national machineries for the advancement of women for development of national action plans. To support the enhanced participation of women in this process, the Commission may wish to consider urging ECOSOC and the General Assembly to get more actively involved through adoption of a resolution on this matter.

A further challenge is to increase political empowerment of women. Recent data by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (31 December 2006) show that global progress in the representation of women in parliaments remains slow: women constitute 16.8 per cent in both houses of parliament worldwide up only by 4 per cent from 12.9 per cent in 1999. Only 32 women preside over one of the Houses of the 189 existing Parliaments. There are 11 women elected Heads of State or Government, 23 Foreign Ministers, 12 Defence Ministers and 20 Ministers of Finance. In 2006, only in two countries Chile and Spain women reached parity with men in Cabinet level positions.

With regard to women's representation in the UN system, I will be briefing the Commission at a later stage. Suffice it to note that among the appointments made by our new Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, is that of Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, appointed as the Deputy Secretary-General whom you heard earlier. As she indicated she is thoroughly

⁶ S/2006/770

⁷ Presidential Statements S/PRST/2004/40 S/PRST/2005/52, S/PRST/2006/42

familiar with gender and women's empowerment issues, as a former member of the CEDAW Committee and Minister for Community Development, Gender and Children of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Madam Chairperson,

A decade of action since Beijing has produced significant results in gender mainstreaming policies, methodologies, tools and activities within the UN system but the systematic practical application of gender mainstreaming by UN entities remains a challenge.

Reflecting this challenge, ECOSOC resolution 2006/36 on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system called on all entities to make gender training mandatory for all staff and personnel at all levels and to ensure the integration of gender perspectives in relevant training courses.

In response, my Office is following-up with the UN entities on their implementation of this resolution. The Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, representing UN entities developed key elements of a system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming, focusing on strengthening UN system-wide accountability, developing gender mainstreaming capacities and competencies, applying results-based management, enhancing evaluation and reporting of results and ensuring system-wide coordination.

At its Sixth Session last week, the Interagency Network commenced work on the development of an action plan. The action plan will reflect the linkages between development, humanitarian issues and peace and security as well as the linkages between the normative and the operational work of the UN system. The Network resolved to develop performance indicators on women, peace and security.

Madam Chairperson,

Allow me to raise the following emerging issues which in my view deserve the Commission's attention.

First, I call on the Commission to take some time to review the rapidly transforming phenomenon of widows. HIV/AIDS pandemic, conflicts, natural disasters to name just a few have left many women, and girls widowed. Abducted girls turned into sex slaves give birth to "fatherless" children – children whose fathers are unknown or perished in the course of the conflict. Many widows have never been married. Many widows have never held a job nor had any income-generating activities. Such widows rarely receive any assistance. Many have resorted to begging as a means of survival of both their children and themselves. In some countries widows are banished and confined to isolation. The result is heightened feminization of poverty and imposition of a heavy burden on already stretched national social security systems. The Commission may wish to consider the rights of widows and their children.

Second, we are privileged to live in a technologically advanced world. Enhanced access to information communication technology is becoming increasingly the means by which women remain connected locally, nationally and globally, and improve their economic and social status. However, the gender digital divide remains wide. Moreover, in some areas it remains unclear how technology impacts on women's safety and bodily integrity, in particular new reproduction technologies and human genetics. The Commission may wish to review this issue as well.

Distinguished delegates,

Allow me to turn to the issue of gender architecture. As you heard earlier both the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General strongly support the recommendation of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment,⁸ to strengthen the UN's response in the area of gender equality and empowerment of women by creating a new gender entity. It is my hope that the Assembly will act expeditiously so that UN efforts for gender equality would be better coordinated and given enhanced visibility and resources.

It is critical to maintain and enhance the momentum created by the 2005 World Summit and the High-level Panel so that the United Nations continues to provide leadership in implementing the UN global commitments to gender equality in an effective, sustainable and systematic manner. The informal thematic debate in the General Assembly on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (on 6 and 7 March 2007), annual ministerial level substantive reviews by a reformed ECOSOC and other high-level meetings offer new entry points for gender equality and opportunities to do more to mobilize the international community behind the goals of gender equality. The Organization is turning to full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Summit Outcome, including the internationally-agreed goals. But the process is slow and uneven.

As the main body on the empowerment of women, this Commission can influence not only ECOSOC, its functional commissions and other bodies but also the lives of women all over the world. On behalf of my Office, the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, I pledge our full cooperation in support of these efforts.

I thank you.

⁸ A/61/583