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**Statement by  
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TO THE 53<sup>rd</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN  
New York, 2 March 2009**

Madam Deputy-Secretary-General,  
Madam President of the Economic and Social Council,  
Mr. Chairperson,  
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

I am delighted to address the Commission on the Status of Women again this year. The high levels of participation of Member States and representatives of the NGO community from around the world illustrate the importance placed on the work of this Commission at national level.

The Commission will consider, as its priority theme, “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS”. This ‘equal sharing of responsibilities’ is absolutely critical for achieving gender equality and empowering women – as clearly recognized in the Beijing Platform for Action and in the outcome documents of the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit on Social Development. Caregiving, in particular, is integral to social development and contributes to economic growth.

Yet, today, in all regions, and regardless of their socio-economic and employment status, women still assume a disproportionate share of responsibilities in the household, including caregiving. These responsibilities have only been heightened in many parts of the world by HIV/AIDS. Due to the serious failure of health systems, the care needs generated by the pandemic are largely met through home-based care provided by women and girls.

The unequal burdens of responsibilities in the household are mirrored by inequality in the public sphere. Women are over-represented in paid care-work, which often has low pay, low-status and few social benefits, particularly in the informal sector of the economy. Such inequalities are often caused by and contribute to limited access by women and girls to education, training and employment opportunities. And they have serious economic, social and political impacts, including women’s reduced potential to participate in public life.

Because of stereotypical attitudes about the roles of women and men, many men may feel constrained from sharing responsibilities more equally. This can negatively affect men’s personal development and wellbeing – and deny families the benefits of more active involvement of men as fathers and caregivers.

The most important factor behind the insufficient progress towards more equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, is that the issue has not received the policy attention it deserves, at global, regional and national levels.

Unpaid care work is not measured or valued in national accounts and therefore receives little, if any, policy attention. And policy responses to reduce the burden of caregiving have often been driven by the need to address the problems created by a rapidly aging society, or by the need to increase women's participation in the labour market.

Responses to relieve the burdens faced by women and girls should challenge, not reinforce, the idea that household work and caregiving are the sole responsibilities of women. They must support the objective of equal sharing of responsibilities.

I encourage the Commission to take bold steps to ensure strong recommendations for Governments and all other relevant stakeholders to adopt and implement effective measures towards two key objectives: (i) to support women and men in balancing paid work with meeting family and other responsibilities, including caregiving; and (ii) to increase the equal sharing of these responsibilities between women and men.

Mr. Chairperson,  
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

In addition to the priority theme, the Commission will discuss a number of other issues, which are closely interlinked and require attention and action. The initiative of the Commission to take up the impact of the financial crisis on women and the achievement of gender equality as an emerging issue will certainly contribute to the work to be undertaken in this critical area by the United Nations over the coming year.

The financial crisis is expected to have serious, widespread impacts on the real economy and particularly on the lives of people already in poverty. Historically, economic recessions have placed a disproportionate burden on women. Women are more likely than men to be in vulnerable jobs, to be under-employed or without a job, to lack social protection, and to have limited access to and control over economic and financial resources. Policy responses to the financial crisis must take gender equality perspectives into account to ensure, for example, that women as well as men can benefit from employment creation and investments in social infrastructure.

During this session, you will also evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on "The equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels" – an extremely important area. This gives the Commission an important opportunity to take stock of implementation of its policy recommendations at national level and provide guidance for accelerating action.

The Commission is also contributing to the new functions of the Economic and Social Council. I am pleased to note the Commission's positive response to the request of the President of ECOSOC to hold an expert panel on the theme of the Annual Ministerial Review – "Global

public health: Implementing the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGS”. This theme is particularly relevant to the Commission’s work, as the health of women and girls is one of the areas of the global public health agenda most in need of urgent attention.

Next year, the Annual Ministerial Review will focus on “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women”. The year will mark the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. I believe that 2010 will, therefore, provide an important opportunity for the entire ECOSOC system to re-energize efforts to realize the goals of gender equality and empowerment of women. We must seize it.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has already initiated the process of preparations, and we would like to ensure broadest possible participation and engagement in these activities. We rely on your active leadership.

Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to assure you that DESA will strengthen its efforts to incorporate the outcomes of this Commission into our ongoing work, across all Divisions, including in our capacity-building programmes.

Please be assured of my Department’s fullest cooperation and support in your important work.

Thank you.