



Deputy Secretary-General

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DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL, IN REMARKS TO COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN,

SPELLS OUT STEPS TO PROMOTE SHARING OF RESPONSIBILITIES BETWEEN GENDERS

Following is the text of UN Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro's remarks to the Commission on the Status of Women, in New York today, 2 March:

I am honoured to be with you today for the opening of the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women. I take this opportunity to assure you that the Secretary-General and I are strongly committed to gender equality, the empowerment of women and the important work of this Commission.

On my right, I see Mr. Sha [Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs], who has also given tremendous support to gender issues, and I welcome his participation.

I welcome the Commission's decision to focus on "the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV and AIDS", as the priority theme for this session.

Imbalances and inequalities in the sharing of responsibilities between women and men persist in both the private and public spheres, and in relation to both paid and unpaid work. Most domestic and care work, for example, is done by women and girls in developed and developing countries alike.

As a result, women face restrictions in employment, education and training, and in participation in public life. And men are constrained in playing an active part in the lives of their families. Families, communities and society as a whole suffer the consequences.

The HIV and AIDS pandemic has illustrated clearly that a range of stakeholders -- including the State, private sector and civil society -- must play a role in caring for people. This is an urgent task that requires a comprehensive approach. Let me highlight a few critical steps that need to be taken.

First, we must recognize unpaid work and caregiving carried out at the household and community level, and value its contribution to social and economic development. This requires improved measurement of such work in national accounts.

Second, we need to reduce the burden -- in terms of both time and the work itself -- of domestic and care responsibilities. This involves investing in quality and affordable care services for children, the elderly, the sick and people living with disabilities. It also requires improving access to public infrastructure such as transportation, water, sanitation and energy.

Third, we must address the significant responsibilities faced by women and girls during home-based care in the context of HIV and AIDS, and find ways to strengthen the role of men. As we do so, we must remember that increased sharing of responsibilities is necessary but not sufficient to address the growing challenges.

Fourth, we should adopt and implement legislation and policies that will promote

reconciliation of work and family responsibilities for both women and men. This includes closing the gap in pay, increasing flexibility in working arrangements, providing better leave provisions and increasing the degree to which men take advantage of these provisions.

We must also develop innovative ways to eliminate gender stereotypes about the roles of women and men, beginning at an early age in homes, schools and communities, and engaging leaders in all walks of life.

Without proper social and rights protection, too many women continue to carry the heaviest burden in caring for those affected by HIV and AIDS. This is unjust and a serious form of discrimination, even a form of violence against them. Through his campaign, "UNite to End all Forms of Violence against Women and Girls", the Secretary-General is resolved to put an end to this scourge. A commitment he has reaffirmed yesterday as he was visiting the Kibati refugee camp near Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Secretary-General continues to promote the message that violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable and never tolerable. And he continues to advocate for sustained international and national efforts to end violence against women and girls. He looks forward to continuing to work with you in eliminating this scourge.

Ensuring that caregivers have the means to do their work effectively has a cost that society must be ready to meet. We must provide adequate resources to empower women and girls who are dedicating their time to looking after people living with HIV. And we must do this even as we grapple with multiple crises, including a global financial crisis that is threatening efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

While these challenges may seem daunting, there are many lessons and good practices to build on. I urge you to use this session of the Commission to exchange ideas and experiences, enhance partnerships, strengthen the global policy framework and reinvigorate implementation of commitments that have been made at the global, regional and national levels.

I wish you success in your important deliberations.

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