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53rd Session of the
Commission on the Status of Women

*The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and
men, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS*

Statement by

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Check Against Delivery

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Ms./Mr. Chair

1. Thank you. It is an honour and a privilege to address the opening session of the 53rd Commission on the Status of Women. The UK aligns itself with the statement made earlier this week by the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union. We would like to make some additional comments focussing on our national priorities.
2. I wish to start by saying how much the UK Government welcomes this important dialogue on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS. The priority theme of this Commission gives us an opportunity to discuss how to best reduce gender inequalities and to empower women, specifically in the context of care-giving, including HIV/AIDS. We also welcome the review theme, equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels, and the emerging theme, gender perspectives of the financial crisis. The emerging theme is highly topical and deserving of discussion in a global forum.
3. This year's themes are interlinked. Women's ability to play an active role in addressing the challenges of the financial crisis is affected by their extensive caring responsibilities as well as, in many cases, discrimination in access to resources and economic opportunities. Similarly, women will struggle to participate equally in decision making while caring responsibilities are not equally divided. There is an opportunity to create a virtuous circle of economic and political participation by women being supported by, and in turn creating the conditions for, increased sharing of care-giving.
4. Women have made great progress in recent decades to the benefit not only of women themselves but of their families, communities and societies. Women's position in UK society and the UK labour market has changed. The median full-time gender pay gap has fallen from 28.0 per cent in 1982 to 12.8 per cent by the most recent measure. Women now comprise 45.8 per cent of the total economically active population, as opposed to 40.5 per cent in 1982. In the developing world too, there has been progress for example in education, the gender gap is closing (albeit slowly), with 95 girls of primary school age in school for every 100 boys in 2006, compared with 92 in 1999. However, there is still a long way to go. Women make up around 64 percent of the estimated 774 million illiterate adults in the world. Worldwide, income-earning opportunities for women have increased. But in developing countries, the majority of women work in the informal sector or as unpaid family workers, and so lack security of income.
5. A key issue affecting the gender pay gap is the disproportionate share of caring done by women. Parents should be given the choice to share caring roles and balance work and family life. To promote this, in the last decade, the UK Government has taken a range of measures including:
 - increasing the length of maternity leave available to women and doubling maternity pay;
 - introducing paid paternity leave and paid adoption leave;
 - introducing the right to request flexible working for parents and carers;
 - implementing the European Parental Leave Directive; and,
 - investing £25 billion in childcare.
6. In June 2008, the UK government published its Carers' Strategy with the aim of improving the lives of carers, the majority of whom are women. It is underpinned by £255 million to implement some immediate steps alongside medium- and long-term plans.
7. Specifically in the context of HIV/AIDS, the UK Government has put resources into helping care for people living with the condition, notably the ring fenced AIDS Support Grant (ASG) which is targeted particularly at areas with large numbers of women and

children living with HIV and AIDS. Internationally, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) supports programmes to achieve Universal Access to comprehensive HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. These programmes are designed in a way that recognizes the need to address gender inequality and women's and girl's rights – in particular sexual and reproductive rights as one of the key drivers of HIV infection. The UK actively promotes the International Conference on Population and Development agenda on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and DFID supports comprehensive programmes for women to improve maternal, sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention. This includes through bilateral programmes to strengthen health systems, as well as to improve women's access to education, employment and social protection.

8. The current economic climate creates additional challenges to promoting and ensuring gender equality. Women are likely to be differently affected by the downturn to men because, for example:
 - women are more likely to be on a low income or form part of a poor household;
 - women tend to have unequal access and control over their household's economic and financial resources;
 - women are often underrepresented in national financial and economic decision making;
 - in many countries, women have significantly lower levels of education and qualifications; and,
 - women tend to work in different sectors and to have different working patterns.
9. To address the specific impacts that are likely to affect women, the UK has measures in place such as:
 - Child tax credits and Working tax credits, which can pay up to 80 percent of childcare costs;
 - the right to 52 weeks of maternity leave for all pregnant employees, and the right to 39 weeks of statutory maternity pay for all working mothers;
 - help with fuel bills for eligible parents;
 - advice for everyone on saving money on food bills;
 - legal protection from discrimination on grounds of working part time, being pregnant, taking maternity leave or being a woman.
10. It is important to understand the differential impacts of the economic downturn on women internationally, and to share what measures and strategies different governments are putting in place to support women and to ensure that they play an active part in the recovery, at national, regional and international levels. We look forward to the outcomes of the discussions during the emerging theme panel, and hope this will lay the groundwork for future cooperation on this issue.
11. Promoting gender equality and the rights of women in all aspects of life is also a key UK government priority, including for the UK's development assistance policy. It is clear that the Millennium Development Goals and other key development objectives will not be reached without greater progress in this area.
12. Advancing the position of women is crucial to ensure more equal sharing of responsibilities in care giving. The UN plays a vital role to this aim and we need to continue strengthening effective gender mainstreaming throughout the entire UN system. Reform of the current UN gender architecture and strong leadership at UN Secretary General level is needed to fortify the UN's response to the needs of countries. It is in our common interest to attain agreement on a reformed gender architecture as soon as possible.

Thank you.