

**59th session of the General Assembly
Second Committee**

**Agenda item 89b
Women in development**

Statement by

**Ms. Carolyn Hannan
Director
Division for the Advancement of Women**

15 November 2004

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues.

I would like to extend my congratulations to you, Mr. Chairperson, on your election and also to the other members of the Bureau. I pledge my full support, and that of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women, for your work during this session.

I am happy to inform you, that the newly appointed Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Ms. Rachel Mayanja, takes up her position this week.

It is my privilege to open the discussion of agenda item 89b, Women in Development, and to present the Secretary-General's report, prepared under this item: *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (A/59/287)*. The present report is prepared in response to General Assembly resolutions 54/210 (1999) and 58/206 (2003) requesting the Secretary-General to update the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, for consideration by the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. The report provides a summary of key elements in the full *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*. It focuses on women and international migration and presents key issues on labour migration, family formation and reunification, rights of migrant women, refugees and displaced persons as well as trafficking of women and girls. The full report will be issued in December 2004 and will be available for broader distribution as a publication of the Division for the Advancement of Women at the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women early next year.

Consideration of women in development within the framework of the General Assembly's work on economic and financial matters, on a biannual basis, provides an important opportunity to highlight gender perspectives in current and emerging economic issues, and to contribute to the formulation and implementation of gender-sensitive development policies and programmes. Earlier reports have focused on macro-economic policy-making and development planning (A/50/399 and A/52/345), access to financial resources (A/56/321) and gender mainstreaming in global policy-making through United Nations conferences and summits and in implementation of these global policies at country level through existing planning and reporting instruments (A/58/135).

Inequalities that impede women's empowerment and their full participation in economic development persist worldwide. In all regions of the world gender relations play a decisive role in the division of labour, income, wealth, education, and public goods and services. Gender gaps in access to and control over resources, such as land and credit, in economic opportunities and in political decision-making are widespread. Resource allocation is often gender-biased within households as well as in the context of local and national budgets. Gender bias can be perpetuated through macro-economic

policies, trade policies and labour market policies. Income disparities, labour market discrimination, high unemployment and the high incidence of poverty among women hinder women's effective contributions to development and are obstacles to economic growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development.

Mr. Chairperson,

Since 1986, the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* has been prepared every five years and has focused on selected emerging development issues that impact on the role of women in the economy at national, regional and global levels. The most recent *World Survey* submitted to this Committee in 1999 covered the issue of globalization, women and work. This current *World Survey* before the Committee addresses women and international migration. The *World Economic and Social Survey 2004*, by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, also focuses on international migration and development.

In his report on the strengthening of the United Nations Organization (A/57/387), the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of more comprehensive attention to migration, with a need to better understand the causes of international flows of people and their complex interrelationship with development. In its resolution on International Migration and Development (A/Res/58/208) adopted at the fifty-eighth session, the General Assembly called upon the United Nations system to address migration issues, including gender perspectives and cultural diversity, within the broader context of the implementation of agreed economic and social development goals and the respect of all human rights.

The Beijing Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference in 1995 recognized that movements of people have profound consequences on family structures and well-being and have unequal consequences for women and men. The Platform highlighted the vulnerability of migrant and refugee women and children to violence, human rights abuse and sexual exploitation. It included recommendations on the economic and legal empowerment of women migrants, including trafficked women, refugees and displaced persons.

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) urged governments to recognize the importance of family unity in framing immigration policies and encouraged efforts to foster the positive effects of international migration, including remittances and technology transfer. The Conference highlighted the need to combat trafficking in migrants, with special emphasis on the protection of women and children trafficked for sexual exploitation and coercive adoptions.

The Secretary-General in his report on violence against women migrant workers (A/58/161) highlighted that while progress had been made at the national and international levels, efforts were still needed in areas such as legislation, access to social services, prevention, awareness and training. The General Assembly, in its resolution 58/143,

urged governments to strengthen measures at the international and domestic levels to protect and empower women migrant workers.

Mr. Chairperson,

The migration of women has always been an important component of international migration. As of 2000, 49 percent of all international migrants were women or girls, and the proportion of women among international migrants had reached 51 percent in more developed regions. Women often migrate officially as dependent family members of other migrants or to marry someone in another country. Female migrants are, however, increasingly part of worker flows, moving on their own to become the principal wage earners for their families. Most women move voluntarily, but women and girls are also forced migrants who have fled conflict, persecution, environmental degradation, natural disasters and other situations that affect their habitat, livelihood and security.

A gender perspective is essential for understanding both the causes and consequences of international migration. The migration experiences of women vary considerably depending on whether movement is voluntary or involuntary and whether entry into the host society occurs legally or not. Gender inequality can be a powerful factor in precipitating migration when women have economic, political and social expectations that opportunities at home do not meet. Migration can empower women to exercise greater autonomy over their lives, both those women who migrate and are exposed to new ideas and values and increased access to resources, as well as those women who remain behind when their husbands or children migrate and assume new roles and responsibility for decisions affecting the social and economic well-being of their families.

Migrant women contribute to the economic development of both their country of destination through their competencies and skills, as well as to their countries of origin through financial contributions from remittances and the improvement of their own education and skills. In countries of origin, women underwrite the migration of others, in particular through their income-generation activities. As migrants, women are sources of remittances that may be used to improve the well-being of other family members and foster economic growth, and in this way act as resources for development.

Refugee and displaced women and girls face particular problems, however, including vulnerability to sexual violence and exploitation. Equal access to food and other essential items is also a key issue for refugee and displaced women and children, as is their participation in decisions regarding their future and that of their families.

The trafficking of women and girls for prostitution and forced labour is one of the fastest growing areas of international criminal activity. Trafficked women frequently originate from regions where opportunities for women are low and where they lack independent access to resources to alter their situations. These women and girls may believe they will work in legitimate occupations but find themselves trapped in forced

prostitution, marriage, domestic work, sweatshops and other forms of exploitation that constitute a contemporary form of slavery. Preventive activities must include education about the dangers of trafficking, in combination with the provision of economic opportunities at home and legal channels of migration for women who might otherwise resort to utilizing smugglers and traffickers.

A number of international instruments outline the human rights of migrants. Despite this, many national laws include discriminatory provisions that negatively impact the human rights of migrant women. For example, laws may include provisions that bar or make it harder for female migrants to bring their husbands and children to join them. Women who are recruited as domestic workers or who enter countries as mail-order brides may have little legal protection from abuse.

World Survey on the Role of Women in Development makes a number of recommendations, for improving the situation of migrant, refugee and trafficked women. These include ratification and implementation of all international legal instruments that promote and protect the rights of migrating women and girls, review of national emigration and immigration laws and policies in order to identify discriminatory provisions, and legal literacy programmes to enhance the human rights of women; as well as development of policies, programmes, education and communication activities to enhance women's access to employment opportunities, safe housing, education and language training, health care and other services; and research and improved data collection activities to provide a more solid basis for the formulation of appropriate gender-sensitive migration policies and programmes. It is hoped that these recommendations can be incorporated into the resolution on international migration to be adopted by the Second Committee this session.

Mr. Chairperson,

The *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* will provide an important input into the ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2005. The Commission will focus on national level implementation through sharing of experiences and good practice, including in a number of high-level interactive events. One high-level panel will focus on integrating gender perspectives into macro-economics and a second will address the challenges in linking the Beijing Platform for Action with the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals.

The Millennium Declaration recognized the need to “promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable”. The General Assembly reaffirmed in its resolution 56/188 of 21 December 2001, that gender equality is of fundamental importance for achieving sustained economic growth. Gender perspectives need to be explicitly outlined in the development of strategies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals on poverty and hunger, education, maternal and child mortality,

HIV/AIDs and other diseases, environmental sustainability and partnerships for development.

The United Nations conferences and summits over the past decade have been instrumental in highlighting the cross-cutting nature of gender perspectives and their relevance for sustainable development, including the promotion of economic growth and poverty eradication, through incorporating attention to gender perspectives in policy recommendations. Greater attention has to be given to implementation strategies, including the establishment of targets and indicators, and to follow-up and reporting mechanisms. The work of the Second Committee provides an opportunity for broadening and strengthening the attention to the gender perspectives in the pursuit of economic growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development. The resolution on the Triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system provides one such important opportunity. A strong recommendation should also be made on the incorporation of gender perspectives into the first comprehensive review of the follow-up to the Millennium Declaration and the Second High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, both of which are planned for 2005.

In closing, may I wish you and the Committee a productive outcome of your deliberations. We look forward to working with the Committee in moving towards our common goal of enhancing the role of women in development and promoting gender equality, particularly in the context of the important reviews to be carried out in 2005.

Thank you.