

**“A new world:  
A vision for gender equality and empowerment of women”**

**address by  
Carolyn Hannan  
Director, Division for the Advancement of Women  
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

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I am honoured to make this presentation to the Contemporary Woman Program at the Brescia University and happy that my first visit to Kentucky is in this context. I want to begin by congratulating Brescia University on its Contemporary Women's Program which I understand was one of the first such programmes to be established at a university in this country. I want to thank the current Director, Sr. Rose Marita O'Bryan for inviting me to talk to you today.

My talk today focuses on a new world or a new vision for the world where gender equality and empowerment of women would be the critical starting point. The vision of gender equality and empowerment of women was first established at global level in the United Nations Charter in 1945 which declared faith “in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small...” This reference to gender equality already at the founding of the United Nations is said to have been largely the result of intensive lobbying by women delegates and representatives of the 42 non-governmental organizations accredited to the founding conference of the United Nations.

**The vision...**

It is difficult to say with certainty what a world truly based on gender equality would look like, since we are still so far from achieving it. The Charter in 1945 did not provide specific details of the changes required to ensure the fundamental rights of both women and men, but this has been clearly elaborated over the past six decades through the world conferences on women organized by the United Nations.

I would like to offer one expression of that vision put forward by the Taskforce on the Millennium Development Goal on Gender Equality and empowerment of Women. This new world would be *“a world in which men and women work together as equal partners to secure better lives for themselves and their families. In this world, women and men share equally in the enjoyment of their capabilities, economic assets, voice, and freedom from fear and violence. They share the care of children, the elderly and the sick;*

*the responsibility for paid employment; and the joys of leisure. In such a world, the resources now used for war and destruction are instead invested in human development and well-being; institutions and decision-making processes are open and democratic; and all human beings treat each other with respect and dignity.”*

Experience over the past decades has certainly produced evidence that a more gender-equal world would be a better world. The Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, once said that there was no development tool more effective than the empowerment of women. He has also stated that if we want to save Africa from famine and HIV/AIDs, we would do well to focus on saving the women of Africa.

The positive links between gender equality and empowerment of women and effective and sustainable development are very clear, particularly in areas where the roles and contributions of women as well as men are visible. Women represent half the resources and half the potentials of families, communities and nations. Research has shown that, in many contexts, more equitable access to education by women and girls can give very positive returns in improved family health, greater productivity, and reduced family size. Greater health for women impacts positively on the health of other family members, especially children.

Experience in agriculture in developing countries has indicated that the neglect of women's productive roles, particularly in relation to food crop production, can be directly related to the persistence of poverty and hunger. There is also evidence from water supply and sanitation programmes in developing countries that the sustainability and impact of these programmes can be positively affected by attention to gender perspectives and increasing the involvement of women.

Investing in women contributes to economic development as well as social gains, and can lead to significant inter-generational payoffs in relation to poverty eradication. The World Bank has concluded that gender equality and empowerment of women makes good economic sense. Women are important as both producers and consumers. It is well established that ensuring women's equitable access to credit is cost-effective as women are generally more reliable credit-takers than men. There is also evidence from a number of countries that the benefits for family welfare of increased incomes for women are greater than the benefits of increased incomes for men. Women's incomes tend to be more consistently utilized for expenditures on health, food and schooling which benefit the whole family.

Gender inequality clearly involves significant costs for society. Women bear the development costs of inequality which not only impact negatively on women themselves, but also on families and communities.

The world is certainly a very different and better place in many ways today than in 1945. There have been significant achievements in relation to gender equality and empowerment of women. Unfortunately, however, gender equality and empowerment of women has not been given the systematic and sustained priority attention needed to

achieve the goals set in the United Nations Charter. While a clear global policy framework on gender equality and empowerment of women has been established over the past decades which guides the efforts of Governments and other actors, the rhetoric is still much better than the practice. In recent years even some of the agreements already reached have been threatened and there is a risk that policy gains in important areas, such as reproductive health, could be eroded.

In my presentation, I will point to the efforts made and achievements accomplished over the past six decades and consider the reasons why the vision for a more gender-equal world has not yet been achieved. I will identify the gains that should be built on, as well as the major obstacles which must be addressed on an urgent basis, to create the increased equality between women and men.

### **Efforts made...**

Over the past six decades, considerable efforts have been made to promote gender equality and empowerment of women by the United Nations as an organization, by individual Member States and by other actors, in particular non-governmental organizations and civil society groups.

The United Nations has played a significant role, particularly in the promotion and protection of the human rights of women, the development of policy recommendations in critical areas, the compilation and dissemination of vital information and statistics, and the monitoring of progress. It has provided an important political space where critical policy discussions and decision-making have taken place.

The United Nations initially focused its work on awareness-raising and collection of information and statistics. An important early area of work was also the establishment of legal measures to protect the human rights of women. It very quickly became apparent however that changing legislation was not enough and more attention had to be given to awareness raising of women themselves and providing support so that they could claim their rights. Attention to gender equality and empowerment of women in the Commission on the Status of Women, which was established in 1946, brought unfamiliar issues into the international political arena. Issues once thought of as strictly private were openly discussed in a global policy context. By the mid 1960s, the United Nations had developed a strong focus on women's role in economic and social development. Delegates from developing countries drew attention in particular to the situation of women in rural areas and the need to enhance their contributions and address their priorities and needs.

Progress was considerably enhanced with the first United Nations world conference on women in Mexico in 1975 and the International Decade for the Advancement of Women from 1976-1985. The United Nations world conferences on women in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995), created a sustained momentum for change. The culmination was the adoption of the global framework for gender equality and empowerment of women, the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, by 189 Member States of the United Nations at the Fourth World Conference in

1995, which identifies 12 priority areas for action – poverty, education, health, decision-making, economy, human rights, violence, conflict, environment, media, the situation of the girl child and institutional arrangements.

The initial work of the United Nations on gender equality was largely carried out by the Commission on the Status of Women, but over the decades other parts of the United Nations have increasingly given attention to gender perspectives in their work, for example the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which focus on social development, population, sustainable development and statistics. The General Assembly also addresses gender equality issues, in particular the human rights of women, including violence against women, and the Security Council has given increasing attention to women and girls in conflict and its aftermath, particularly following the adoption of the path breaking resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in 2000.

Pressure from civil society and non-governmental organizations has been a crucial factor in ensuring that Member States comply with international agreements. Women's groups and networks have played a major role in energizing debates and increasing the visibility of gender equality issues at global and regional levels, as well as ensuring action and concrete achievements at national level.

### **Progress identified in the ten-year review**

In the ten year review of implementation of the *Beijing Platform for Action* carried out in 2005, governments reported important gains in relation to each of the 12 priority areas in all regions, but also pointed to serious obstacles and challenges in every area.

Positive developments include the fact that policies and strategies for gender equality have now been developed in almost all countries and that a range of mechanisms have been established at national level to promote and monitor gender equality (such as women's ministries, gender equality commissions, ombudspersons offices and parliamentary networks). In addition, countries have increased adherence to international and regional human rights mechanisms, such as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW). Increased efforts are being made to engage men and boys in the work for gender equality and empowerment of women.

However, even though significant gains have been made in these areas, there is still much room for improvement. Many excellent policies and strategies on gender equality and empowerment of women are not fully implemented; mechanisms put in place to promote gender equality and empowerment of women may have unclear mandates, limited resources and little access to real power; implementation of treaties ratified is not given sufficient priority at national level; and in some cases attempts to engage men have been misunderstood and efforts are mistrusted by the women's movement, sometimes because they have shifted the focus from promoting gender equality to protecting male privileges.

There have been some significant advances for women in many parts of the world in relation to health, education and employment. Even in these areas, however, there are still grounds for continued concern. For example, in many countries the gains made in terms of improved access of girls and women to education have not empowered women or translated into benefits in terms of increased employment opportunities. While access to health services has improved in many countries, in other countries women lack even the most basic reproductive health care; health research in most countries is still based on males, and many women-specific health needs and priorities go unaddressed. In some cases, women's increased access to employment is only to work of a part-time nature, both vertical and horizontal occupational segregation persist, and women's wages remain often significantly less than men's.

Many serious gaps and challenges to gender equality and empowerment of women remain. The persistent, and in some cases increasing, incidence of violence against women; the under-representation of women in decision-making in all areas and at all levels; the continuation of discriminatory laws governing marriage, land, property and inheritance; the fact that women continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, the devastating effects of conflict on women, particularly sexual violence, is unacceptable in this new millennium. In addition, new challenges for women's empowerment and gender equality have emerged over the past decade, such as combating HIV/AIDS; addressing trafficking in women and girls; and mobilizing the new information and communication technologies (ICT) in support of gender equality and women's empowerment.

### **The example of women's participation in decision-making**

I will now briefly outline some of the achievements made and remaining gaps and obstacles in one key area, women's political participation, which I hope will illustrate the nature of the challenges facing us in our work for gender equality and empowerment of women in all other areas. The Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, on International Women's Day this year stated that it is "*right and indeed necessary that women should be engaged in decision-making processes in all areas, with equal strength and in equal numbers.*"

I chose this particular topic, partly because the Commission on the Status of Women covered this theme at its recent 50<sup>th</sup> session, and partly because I believe this is one area which is critical for furthering progress and one in which achievement of goals set in Beijing has been woefully poor. It is also topical because this year we commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the granting of the right to *both* vote *and* hold office – in Finland - which meant that for the first time women could vote and vote for a woman. It is interesting that this year, women in Kuwait were given the possibility to exercise this right for the first time, 100 years later. Just this week, Kuwaiti women were able for the first time to vote in and run for public election. Two women ran against 6 men for a single seat on a 16 member municipal council. This local election paves the way for women in Kuwait to take part in parliamentary elections in 2007.

There have been some exciting developments in women's *political participation* at national levels recently, including the election of the first woman President in Africa, Ellen Sirleaf-Johnsson in Liberia, the election of a woman, Angela Merkel, as the head of state in Germany and the election of Michelle Bachelet as the new President in Chile. Important achievements in political decision making have also been made, more quietly, in other countries. For example, following recent elections in Tanzania, seven women ministers were appointed, including in the critical posts of Foreign Affairs, Finance and Justice. In Austria, six out of 12 office holders in the Federal Government are women, including the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

However, despite these important gains, and the global political recognition of the fundamental right of women and men to participate in political and public life, the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* equality in the area of power and decision-making remains wide. The proportion of seats held by women in legislative bodies is the highest world average reached to date and yet it is dismally low - 16 percent. While this figure indicates a trend of gradual growth, the pace of change is clearly far too slow. Only 14 countries have at least 30 percent representation of women in parliament, which had been established as a target for 1995, and is still not achieved ten years later.

Many of the gains that have been made, in particular in Africa and Latin America, can be attributed to affirmative action, such as quotas, established in constitutions, by legislation or through temporary special measures.

One encouraging trend is the fact that a number of post-conflict countries have highlighted and addressed the importance of including women in reconstruction processes, and of ensuring their participation in new democratic institutions. As a result, Rwanda, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, Timor-Leste, Uganda and Eritrea - appear in the top 30 countries with regard to women's participation in legislative bodies, averaging between 25 and 30 percent of women legislators, and Rwanda currently has the highest proportion of women in parliament in the world. It will be important to ensure that these gains can be maintained and that the women in parliament are able to have a significant impact on policy-making processes and outcomes from a gender perspective.

Broader participation of women at *local levels* of decision-making may be an important first step toward women's meaningful participation at the national level. The International Association of Local Authorities has set the criteria of no more than 60 percent representation of either sex in local assemblies. Since 1993, one-third of seats in local councils in India are reserved for women. This allows large numbers of women to enter political life for the first time.

It is important to note, however, that the local context is not always inherently more democratic or more open to women's involvement. Considerable specific support is required to ensure that women can participate effectively. Where such support is provided, the benefits can be great. Studies of women's participation in village councils report on the empowering effects for the women themselves as well as the positive impact of women's presence on local politics. Women's presence has made the councils

more responsive to community demands for infrastructure, housing, schools, and health. It has also helped improve the implementation of various government programmes, and it has increased the likelihood that other women also feel empowered and take advantage of state services and demand rights.

There is little statistical data available on women in other areas of decision-making. For example, we know very little about the representation of women in the *judiciary* at national level, even at the level of the highest courts. Internationally, a breakthrough was achieved with the appointment of 7 women of 18 judges, as well as the appointment of a woman as Vice President, of the International Criminal Court and Court, which was a direct result of affirmative action.

While in many countries women's share of low and middle-level positions within *media* organizations has risen over the last decade, the number of women in senior press, radio and television, and the newly emerging sectors of telecommunications, multi-decision-making positions remained very small – in both traditional media institutions of media and e-media. Reliable and comparable data are scarce. A study published by the International Federation of Journalists found that although around one third of journalists today are women, less than 3 per cent of senior media executives and decision-makers are women. Women are also under-represented in critical media advisory bodies, such as control boards of broadcasting agencies.

Comparable data is also needed on the *academic world* to confirm the picture which emerges from some countries. While an increasing number of women are graduating from universities, both at graduate and post-graduate levels and often with better results than men, women are not gaining secure employment in academia or receiving funding for research to the same extent as men. In addition, women are seriously under-represented in higher decision-making positions, such as Presidents or as Chancellors, including in the Nordic countries which otherwise have a good record on women's representation in the legislature and the executive.

Little is known about women's equitable participation within *non-governmental organizations* (NGOs). There has been a significant increase in women's specific organizations and networks over the past decade and women have developed a relatively powerful political voice in this manner in many contexts. However, it is important not to accept that women should only be heard through their separate civil society organizations. Women should also be equitably represented in all NGOs and have access to decision-making within these organizations. This is another area where data is scarce, but anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that in many NGOs in all parts of the world, women are under-represented at decision-making levels, and gender equality concerns are often neglected.

Data collection and dissemination is even less systematic in relation to *economic* decision-making. It is only possible to discern some general trends. According to ILO, women's share of management positions remains generally low, despite educational advances for women in many parts of the world. Research indicates that currently women

constitute only 33 per cent of managerial and administrative posts in the developed world; 15 per cent in Africa; and 13 per cent in Asia and the Pacific.

Very little comparable data exists on the representation of women in the *private sector*. Statistics available from the Nordic countries, for example, illustrate that although women's participation in parliament and the public sector is high, women are seriously under-represented in the private sector, for example as CEOs or on corporate boards. In this context, Norway has recently initiated important legislation on gender balance on corporate boards (at least 40%), with the potential to dissolve boards which do not comply. This has already led to an increase in the number of women on boards in Norway and has generated considerable international interest.

There is little comparable data available on women's participation in *international organizations*. Statistics from some Ministries of Foreign Affairs show serious under-representation of women at higher levels. This has implications for the appointment of women as representatives of countries in international contexts. This is sadly well illustrated by the fact that, of 191 Permanent Representatives to the United Nations in New York, only 18 are women – and this is the highest number ever in the 60 years of the United Nations.

There are few women as Special Representatives of the Secretary General in the area of *peace and security*, and few women among peacekeepers and police in peace-keeping missions. This is a reflection of low levels of women's participation in these areas at national level, as well as the failure of countries to nominate women as candidates. Attention to women's participation and representation in peace and security activities has, however, increased significantly since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325, which specifically calls for an increase in the involvement of women, particularly in senior level positions. Peacekeeping missions have worked to promote gender balance in local police forces and worked directly with women's groups and networks to ensure incorporation of gender dimensions into elections, the constitution, legislation and recruitment policies for the civil service. Available data highlights some progress made but also illustrates that much more needs to be done.

Among factors that impede women's participation in decision-making and need to be specifically addressed, are the persistence of stereotypical attitudes, women's disproportionate share of household and family responsibilities, poverty, structural and cultural barriers, violence against women, the lack of equal employment opportunities, limited access to education, and traditional ways of working in political parties and other political institutions which discourage women from seeking public office, in particular leadership positions, through discriminatory attitudes and practices and lack of attention to mechanisms which support a balance between family and work responsibilities.

A concerted international effort is required to more systematically collect, disseminate and use data on women's participation in all areas of decision-making in public life. Similarly, databases on women leaders are needed to provide a resource to those seeking women for leadership positions in national, multilateral, intergovernmental



and international organizations, including in the area of peace and security. Without this, it will continue to be simply too easy to say there are no suitable and willing women candidates, with the necessary, skills or experience without actually making an effort to identify women candidates.

Ensuring that both women and men will be able to influence decisions and resource allocations requires, however, going beyond simply increasing the number of women in different positions, to providing real opportunities for influencing the agendas, institutions and processes of decision-making. Values, norms, rules, procedures and practices, including political bodies such as parliaments and political parties, can effectively restrict women's potential to make real choices and to give explicit attention to relevant gender perspectives.

This overview of women's participation in decision-making provides a somewhat dismal but realistic picture of what has been achieved and what still remains to be done. It is sometimes claimed that women should be more involved in decision-making because they are less corrupt than men. However, the truth is that we cannot say this with certainty, since women have never been given the chance to prove themselves through equal participation in decision-making in any field. It has also been said that the real test of achievement of gender equality is when women can be as mundane as men and still succeed. This is a somewhat cynical way of saying that, because we still live in an unequal world, to succeed in any area, women often have to do much better than men.

### **Moving forward in creating the new world**

To move forward in creating a new world based on gender equality, we need to *build on the gains we have already made* and make full use of mechanisms that have proven useful and have potential for having an even greater impact.

An important learning that emerged from the ten-year review is that there is a huge gap between policy and practice which must be explicitly addressed. We do not need more recommendations. In most areas the actions required are already well known. The challenge is ensuring effective implementation. The Declaration adopted by Member States at the ten-year review called for accelerated implementation of the existing global policy framework, the Platform for Action.

There is a clear need for increased advocacy and demands for action, for accountability of decision-makers, and for systematic monitoring and reporting on process. Governments – in particular political leaders - obviously have the main responsibility, but non-governmental organizations and community groups can and should play a critical role – in “raising the bar”, keeping attention on the issue and “blowing the whistle” whenever necessary.

The United Nations should continue to play an important role, in particular at national level through its operational activities. The Commission on the Status of Women could have a strong impact through its increased focus on reviewing progress at national

level and foster greater sharing of ideas, experience, lessons learned and good practices, which are the basis of its newly adopted work programme.

A critical mechanism for promoting gender equality and empowerment of women is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The convention was adopted in 1979, and entered into force in 1981. Today 182 States have ratified the treaty. The Optional Protocol to the Convention, adopted in 1999, has been ratified by 78 States. The protocol offers women an international avenue of redress for alleged violations of their rights. It also allows the Committee – the 23 independent experts elected to monitor the implementation of the Convention - to conduct inquiries into situations of grave or systematic violations in States parties.

The value of the Convention as a critical accountability mechanism must be recognized and new strategies developed to ensure its full implementation. When countries ratify the Convention, they assume specific obligations. States parties are expected to include the principle of equality of women and men in their constitutions, and to realize this principle in practice through laws and other means in both public and private domains. The convention obliges States to remove both de jure, as well as de facto discrimination – which is very important in countries where the laws may be very good, but where practice leaves much to be desired.

A major strength of the Convention is the fact that States Parties are required to report on a regular basis. When States parties present their reports, their representatives meet with the Committee for a constructive dialogue on progress in implementing the Convention at national level. The Committee prepares a set of recommendations on action needed to improve the implementation of the Convention. This set of recommendations, specifically tailored for the individual States parties, is a very unique "instrument" that could be used more systematically and effectively at national level by governments, parliaments, civil society and by the United Nations and external donors.

The convention has been an inspiration for women in all parts of the world. It has had a positive impact on legal and policy development, leading to significant change at national level – in constitutions, legislation and in courts. The Convention has also been effectively utilized by NGOs as a benchmark for assessing the situation of women and as a tool for advocacy and activism.

*Civil society* has played a critical role in achieving the progress made on gender equality and empowerment of women, and will continue to be instrumental in accelerating progress. Ensuring greater involvement of civil society in its work is a challenge facing the United Nations. This includes, in keeping with the principles and spirit of the United Nations, bringing in the voices from all regions, including in policy making.

There is a need for change and renewal, however, even within these organizations. Many participants at the ten-year review noted that the review process had illustrated the continuing importance and strength of the women's movement. Many also

acknowledged the need for change and renewal and emerging tensions which needed to be addressed, for example in relation to divergent analyses of women in different political, economic, social and cultural contexts. Many identified the need to address issues of identity, representation, power and accountability, even within the NGO world.

Galvanizing new broad-based coalitions for gender equality and empowerment of women outside the women's movement, such as the vibrant movements on social development and the environment, can strengthen women's voices, provide access to new resources, and lead to strategic alliances in advocating for policy change. There is a need to reinvigorate interaction with academia, particularly since the identified constraints to progress include lack of data and under-researched areas where anecdotal evidence is not sufficient basis for development of policy recommendations.

An important aspect of this momentum for change must be to strengthen the work at *local community levels*, which could be through non-governmental organizations but can also be through other less formally organized bodies. An important first step must be building awareness of the situation of women relative to men, in the communities themselves, in the wider national level and at global level. In many cases, women and men at local level are not sufficiently aware to be able to bring about the required changes in their own lives and "worlds" and to develop the needed solidarity for change in the situations of women around the world.

Let me turn now to a number of **critical gaps and challenges** need to be explicitly addressed to ensure the world based on gender equality.

In the recent ten-year review, Government responses illustrated that attitudes towards the gender equality and empowerment of women among the general public and within Government bureaucracies have not changed at the same pace as policy, legal and institutional frameworks. This is one of the main reasons why practice does not match rhetoric. *Stereotypical attitudes and practices* are working to the disadvantage of women and girls in all areas of society – in families, educational institutions, religious institutions, cultural institutions, workplaces, political bodies and in the media. Often the stereotypical attitudes and behaviours are difficult to pinpoint and address.

Experience has shown that even if leadership in Government or in organizations, such as the United Nations or the World Bank, make clear statements about the goal of gender equality and empowerment of women, without changes in attitudes and practices at lower levels little positive change will result. Explicitly addressing persistent stereotypical attitudes and discriminatory practices is critical to the full implementation of the Platform for Action. This will require significant awareness raising efforts and development of mechanisms for holding people accountable for what they do.

Addressing stereotypes will require a specific focus on men and boys. Women and girls will also need to be specifically targeted since many stereotypes have been internalized through upbringing, education, and the media. Negative attitudes and practices are accepted as the norm by both women and men. As a result women and girls

can have negative or low expectations and self-images. Change will require significant efforts and take time. Clearly the important starting points must be in families and in schools, reaching both girls and boys in the important formative years. Media has also a critical role to play. Good practices have been developed in schools and communities and in media which can be replicated in other contexts.

Let me give one example of how negative attitudes and practices can hinder achievement of gender equality. Efforts to promote women's human rights in the 1970s and 1980s included legislative change and legal literacy programmes to ensure that women were aware of their rights and how to claim them. Assessment of the reasons for limited progress of the programme revealed the need to address the negative attitudes of the police, lawyers and judges which were a significant hinder to women achieving access to justice. This led to an intensive programme of training on women's human rights which had significant positive results. I

In one country, however, none of the measures seemed to lead to the expected changes. Investigation revealed that women did not even get past the "courthouse door" as lower-level officials, including doormen – who had not been reached by the training - were effectively blocking physical women's access, for example, with the justification that women should not waste the time of the courts. I am sure we could find equally telling examples of how stereotypes hinder gender equality and empowerment of women closer to home.

I would also like to raise *gender-based violence* as a serious form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men and requires a comprehensive response from Governments and other stakeholders, including actions to prevent violence, prosecute and punish perpetrators and provide remedies and relief to victims.

Gender-based violence is exacerbated in conflict and its aftermath. Over the past decade women and girls have become prime targets of armed conflict and suffered its impact disproportionately; particularly as gender-based and sexual violence have become weapons of warfare. As the majority of the world's refugees and internally displaced persons, women and children are also vulnerable to violence, even in refugee camps.

The vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS in many parts of the world, and particularly in Africa, can be directly linked to the relations between women and men as well as to persistent stereotypes about what is appropriate and acceptable behaviour for women and men in relation to reproduction and sexuality. Violence against women increases the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS, including by removing their possibilities to negotiate safe sexual relationships. As a result, many women and girls live in intolerable environments of fear – fear of the violence itself and fear of the consequences of not being able to make demands and protect themselves.

Much of what I have said so far in this presentation, must make very clear that gender equality is not only important for women and girls- it should also be a concern for

*men and boys*. Promotion of gender equality cannot be done by women alone and in a vacuum – men and boys are affected and must be involved in the process of change.

The attitudes and behaviour of men and boys can have significant impact on the lives and wellbeing of women and girls. In many areas of the world, these impacts are far from positive, particularly in relation to violence, harassment in the workplace and other areas, reproductive health, trafficking and HIV/AIDS.

Awareness of this has led to increased efforts to reach and involve men and boys in positive ways in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. Programmes aim to encourage men to make important contributions to reproductive health by ensuring egalitarian and consenting sexual relations and taking responsible roles in relation to pregnancy, birth and childcare. Many programmes seek to change negative attitudes and behaviours that compromise the health and safety of women and girls.

In many countries around the world, including Nicaragua, South Africa, India, Canada, Sweden and this country, men have mobilized themselves in groups and networks to support, for example, campaigns to eliminate violence against women. Men are increasingly taking greater responsibility for child care, and indeed in some countries have come to demand the opportunity to do so. There has been a significant positive shift in involvement in family life over one generation, with benefits for women and children and men themselves. There are many win-win situations with significant gains for men as well as women in promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.

Creating a more gender-equal world will, however, involve some changes which men will not find easy. Involving more women in decision-making in all the areas discussed earlier, does mean that some men will not be able to take on these roles. However, one has to keep in mind the fact that for centuries women have not even had this possibility. There will be a transitional period, but attitudes will change and it will be accepted that both women and men should have equal opportunities and benefits without this being seen as a loss for men.

There is increased research on the gains for men from gender equality, including the emotional and social benefits from greater involvement in day-to-day family life as well as new forms of interaction with women based on partnership within marriages, workplaces and communities. It will be important to increase such research and related programmes focused on men and boys.

A major problem which requires urgent attention is the *separateness or “marginalization”* of work to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. Although many specific mechanisms are in place – such as gender equality policies and strategies, action plans, training programmes and monitoring mechanisms – all too often these live a “life of their own” and are not well integrated into existing mainstream policies, processes and mechanisms. As result, they have limited impact.

Gender perspectives are still not seen as essential for achieving the goals of all policy areas. Many Governments and organizations continue to base their work on the assumption that certain policy areas – for example, economics or infrastructure or other technical areas – are “gender-neutral”. Even where the gender implications are well known and where gender analysis is relatively well developed, for example in social sectors such as health or water and sanitation, there has often been limited success in effectively using this analysis to bring about needed changes in policies and programmes, and thus limited impact on the ground.

A key focus in the coming decade must be to ensure that gender analysis is the basis for policy development and decision-making in all areas. No decisions should be taken, or resources allocated, without analysis of the existing roles and contributions of women and men, and of the potential impact of planned actions on both women and men. Capacity to effectively utilize this analysis must be developed as required competence at all levels in organizations.

### **Critical steps to bring about change**

An enabling environment for enhancing promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women needs to be developed by improving women’s *capabilities*, including through education and health; increasing their access to and control over *opportunities and resources*, such as employment, land and economic assets; enhancing their *agency and leadership* roles; as well as protecting and promoting their *human rights* and ensuring their *security*, including freedom from violence.

It is critical to reassess, and to redirect as necessary strategies, approaches, methodologies and tools utilized to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. There are a number of critical questions to be addressed: What underlies the pervasiveness of discrimination in all its forms? In what ways are gender inequalities reproduced within societies - through which norms, practices and institutions and how can these be addressed? Why is attention to gender inequality in public policy and programmes ad hoc and selective and how can we achieve more systematic and effective implementation across all areas of public policy? How do we secure accountability at all levels?

Moving forward will require enhanced political will and greater visible leadership from top levels in Governments and in international organizations, such as the United Nations; significantly increased allocation of resources, including through gender-sensitive budget processes at all levels; strengthened accountability for all key actors, and improved monitoring and reporting on progress. Accountability is one of the most critical issues, where we do not yet have good solutions – that is, for holding key actors responsible for gender equality and empowerment of women in order to move beyond rhetoric.

### **New opportunities**

The framework of Millennium Development Goals (one of which is focused on gender equality and empowerment of women) was developed after the Millennium Summit in 2000. The Millennium Development Goals have effectively mobilized Governments, international organizations and NGOs and enhanced the focus on implementation and reporting. Although attention to gender equality in the other goals (focused on poverty, education, health, HIV/AIDS, environment and solidarity) has not been adequate to date, the Millennium Development Goals do provide important new opportunities for increasing the visibility of gender issues in national development planning and reporting, developing new alliances and increasing access to resources.

In the 2005 World Summit, world leaders declared that progress for women is progress for all and reiterated their resolve to eliminate discrimination against women. This provides a new opportunity to enhance the focus on gender equality. Women are disproportionately affected by many of the problems demanding world attention, such as poverty and conflicts. A strong focus on women's contributions, priorities and needs in implementation of the commitments made by heads of state at the World Summit will be essential to ensure effective and enduring solutions to the huge problems facing the world today.

The on-going process of reform provides a unique opportunity for the United Nations to increase the attention to gender equality and the empowerment of women across the United Nations system, ensuring a strong explicit focus in new bodies being created and increased demands for responsibility and accountability in existing bodies. It will be important to ensure that attention to the institutional mechanisms and resources for gender equality are given adequate consideration in the United Nations reform process. All parts of the system should have significant specific human and financial resources allocated for an enhanced focus on gender equality and empowerment of women as an integral part of follow-up to the 2005 World Summit.

As the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has emphasized time and time again - gender equality is not the responsibility of women, it is the responsibility of us all, women as well as men. We must all share this responsibility in solidarity with the struggles of women around the world.

Our individual contributions are important. At the very least, we should be clear about the vision of the world we want to see and ensure that it is achieved in our own "worlds". We all - men as well as women - need to stand up and refuse to accept the inequalities we still face or see around us. These inequalities are often subtle and insidious and it often takes considerable courage to confront them, particularly when this is often seen as petty and ridiculous.

Only if we are prepared to do this, can there be hope for gender equality and empowerment of women in the wider world.