

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**Statement by
MR. SHA ZUKANG
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
TO THE FIFTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF
WOMEN**

New York, 1 March 2010

Mr. Chairman,
President of the Economic and Social Council,
Madam Deputy Secretary-General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to address this year's opening session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

This Commission occupies a unique place in the constellation of the functional commissions of ECOSOC. It attracts the personal attention of the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General. Although I am head of the Department, I am only "number 3" in the echelon of gender leadership. You can understand why I feel like a "dwarf", overshadowed by the lofty leadership of the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General, not to mention the tenacity of our Special Adviser, Ms. Rachel Mayanja.

But seriously, I am happy to see the personal commitment and engagement of the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General in the cause of gender equality and empowerment of women. The initiatives they have taken in this noble cause are unprecedented in the history of the United Nations.

To give you but one example, the Secretary-General has appointed so far the largest number of Women Under-Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General in the UN system.

To borrow a colloquial phrase, on gender issues, the Secretary-General "has talked the talk and walked the walk". He has backed up his commitment with real action.

Distinguished Delegates,

As you know, the UN calendar this year is marked by several landmark events on gender equality and empowerment of women. The 54th session of the Commission is the opening salvo,

launching the fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action.

The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 was a global gathering of far-reaching significance. It brought about a new international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for all women, everywhere.

The Platform for Action contains a key strategy to achieve these goals. It is characterized by its two-fold approach: targeted action for women combined with the integration of gender equality perspectives in all sectoral policies and programmes, often seen in now the ubiquitous action word “mainstreaming”.

This fifteen-year review is therefore an opportune time to take stock of progress, identify gaps and challenges and reflect on lessons learned.

The review also provides the critical opportunity to reorient and focus global, national and local actions towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development.

Such a re-orientation is crucial at a time when we continue to tackle the multiple crises of food insecurity, climate change and the fall-out of the global financial and economic crisis. Conditions for sustained growth remain fragile, and employment prospects remain bleak. All of these challenges have impacted on women and girls.

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,

This grim situation notwithstanding, we should take pride in what we have achieved over the past fifteen years.

We have seen successful country efforts to improve legislative frameworks for empowerment of women.

Many Governments have formulated and implemented comprehensive policies and action plans to advance gender equality.

An increasing number of Governments have put in place enhanced institutional mechanisms and awareness-raising campaigns in support of women’s empowerment.

The challenge, therefore, is not that there is no progress; the real challenge lies in the fact that progress is uneven across regions and within countries. The easy part of the action has happened. What lies ahead is more daunting.

For example, even though women are increasingly participating in the workforce, they are disproportionately represented in informal work. Such work is often precarious, poorly paid, and not covered by labour legislation or social protection.

The persistent unequal sharing of unpaid work between women and men, including care-giving, adversely affects women's choices and opportunities in the labour market.

I challenge those in a decision-making position to do something concrete. Build more child care centres; allow longer paid maternal leave; allow paternity leave – this way, men have no excuse for not participating in child-care. They can no longer say, for example, that they have too much work in the office!

On the economic front, women in many parts of the world also continue to face discrimination in access to economic resources - such as credits, land - often because of societal attitudes and stereotypes.

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,

As I mentioned earlier, the year 2010 is a crucial year for concerted efforts to accelerate achievement of the goals of gender equality and empowerment of women. All opportunities must be seized to give new impetus to the promotion of gender equality and women's enjoyment of their human rights.

The work of this Commission is an important contribution to the upcoming Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council, which will focus on the implementation of internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women.

I am delighted that the President of the Council is attending the session to hear in person your priorities and concerns, your actions and lessons learned.

In terms of gender-related MDGs, I wish to emphasize in particular that there cannot be progress towards achieving the MDGs without progress in gender equality. Accelerating gender-sensitive MDG performance requires participatory processes and strategic partnerships, strengthened political commitment and leadership, improved analysis, monitoring and reporting, and investment in gender equality and empowerment of women.

Your focus on the linkages between these actions and processes should translate into a concrete action agenda on gender equality issues in the MDG Summit which will take place in September.

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,

Given the uneven progress among regions, I welcome the review processes undertaken by the UN regional commissions, including the review economic empowerment.

The reviews echoed the findings of the *2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* issued by DESA. The *World Survey* illustrated that the structural constraints

hindering women's economic empowerment have not been adequately addressed over the past decade. Most equality enhancing measures have been undertaken at the micro level. Gender equality perspectives have largely been ignored in macroeconomic analysis.

As the *World Survey* stresses, an integrated economic and social policy framework is needed to promote the equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth. The interdependencies between economic and social policies, the formal and informal economy, and paid and unpaid work must be recognized and explicitly addressed.

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,

The Beijing Platform for Action continues to guide our action today. We have gained extensive experience and knowledge of what works and how to achieve results. These good practices must be scaled up, and applied consistently by Member States, the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders – particularly for the benefit of women and girls.

In this regard, I want to salute the hundreds of women NGO participants. You have played an indispensable role. We value your engagement and participation.

I wish you success in your deliberations and assure you, Mr. Chairman and the members of the Bureau, of DESA's full support. I look forward to the outcome of the Commission's deliberations.
