

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement
by
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Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fourth session
1 – 12 March 2010

Chairperson,
President of the Economic and Social Council,
Madam Deputy Secretary-General,
Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Representatives of the NGO community and of United Nations entities,
Colleagues and Friends,

I am honoured to address the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. I would like to extend a warm welcome to all Ministers, Heads of Delegations, Heads of national mechanisms for gender equality and other Government representatives, who have traveled to New York for this very important session. I also welcome the large number of representatives of non-governmental organizations and networks.

I express my deep appreciation to the Chair and the members of the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women for the very effective preparation of this session through a series of consultations with all Member States and observer States of the Commission.

At this session, the Commission will undertake a review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. It will also contribute to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Strong and visible leadership and commitment at all levels is required to move forward the agenda for gender equality. Your deliberations during this session should galvanize the efforts of all stakeholders, forge strategic partnerships and improve participatory processes to achieve measurable outcomes for women.

This session will also produce critical inputs into intergovernmental discussions later in 2010. Of particular relevance is the Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council in July, dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women; and the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly in September 2010 on achieving the MDGs by 2015. The Commission has a critical catalytic role for ensuring that the gender equality perspective is fully addressed. Furthermore, the tenth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security later this year presents yet another opportunity to devise ways to tackle the remaining challenges.

Chair,

The gap between rhetoric and action, between commitments and implementation must be closed. The time for action is now. There cannot be progress towards achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, without progress in gender equality. Discrimination against women and inequality impede progress in development, peace and security and the realization of human rights.

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

These are indeed difficult times; times of uncertainty. Although there are some signs of recovery, the continuing global economic and financial crisis have led to job and income losses, cutbacks in public expenditure for essential social services such as education and health, with differentiated impact on women. These and the potentially disproportionate impact of climate change on women require explicit and systematic policy responses.

Chair,

We acknowledge that the implementation of Platform for Action has yielded positive results for women and girls. Most gains have been made in education, particularly primary education. In some countries, women's enrollment at the tertiary level now exceeds that of men. Women's access to paid employment has increased, albeit at a slow pace. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has reached almost universal ratification, with 186 States being party to the treaty.

Policies to address HIV/AIDS increasingly place emphasis on prevention, treatment care and support services for women.

National mechanisms for gender equality, including ministries and offices in the executive branch, as well as parliamentary committees and independent, advisory and monitoring bodies play a key role in the promotion of gender equality. A gender mainstreaming strategy is increasingly applied across all sectors, supported by a wider

range of tools, capacity-building programmes and training. Monitoring and evaluation of efforts has improved.

Despite these advances, progress in improving women's lives, eliminating discrimination and violence and achieving equality has been uneven across countries and regions. The pace of progress towards the realization of the MDGs is very slow. There has been almost no progress with regard to MDG 5, to improve maternal health.

Illiteracy remains a serious constraint for women, who continue to account for nearly two thirds of the 776 million illiterate adults in the world. The global economic and financial crisis has created new hurdles. According to a report of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the unemployment rate is higher for women than for men. In 2008, the unemployment rate for women was 6.3 per cent as compared to 5.9 per cent men. More women than men remain trapped in insecure and often unpaid work and in poverty.

Chair,
Excellencies,

We are also witnessing the growing problem of trafficking of women and children. Human beings are being bought and sold as commodities, many of whom are women and girls. Emergency situations such as those in Haiti and also in Chile increase the risk of trafficking, especially of young girls.

The criminals responsible for these violations of human rights are doing so for different reasons, but trafficking for the purpose of the removal organs is clearly one of the most abhorrent forms. This is why the Council of Europe and my office commissioned a study on this issue. The study entitled "Trafficking in organs, tissues and cells and trafficking in human beings for the purpose of the removal of organs" was launched in October in 2009. Calls for a binding instrument were made at the launch. The Commission must get engaged in addressing this issue as poverty and discrimination are among the reasons supporting this phenomenon.

Chair,

Allow me now to present the reports before the Commission. The report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2010/2) on the "Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals". The report draws on the responses to a questionnaire provided by the United Nations regional commissions to all Member States and observer States in their respective regions. It also draws on findings of an Expert Group Meeting convened by the Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with UNDP and hosted by ECE in November last year. It identifies gaps and challenges in regard to each of the twelve critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action and highlights the linkages between the implementation of the Platform and the

achievement of the MDGs. To accelerate progress and close implementation gaps, the report proposes a series of cross-cutting strategies and actions for all critical areas of concern, as well as specific ones for each critical area of concern. Strengthened efforts are needed to tackle persistent and emerging gaps and challenges, and to build on achievements, lessons learned and good practices.

The five regional commissions of the United Nations have held regional review processes and produced regional reports. Four regional review meetings took place in October and November 2009. The Commission will hold an inter-active panel discussion on 4 March, on the regional perspectives with Executive Secretaries and senior officials from the five regional commissions.

Chair,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Over the next two weeks, the Commission will hold a high-level general debate, a high-level roundtable and a series of interactive expert panel discussions that will focus on the sharing of experiences and good practices and identify ways to overcome remaining obstacles and new challenges in implementation of the Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2010/3). Your discussions also provide an opportunity to consider the implementation of the Platform for Action as a framework for accelerating progress towards achieving the MDGs.

Under agenda item 3 (c), the Commission has before it a number of reports and conference room papers, including a report on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women for the period October 2008 to September 2009 (E/CN.6/2010/4); the biennial report on the release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts (E/CN.6/2010/5); and a report on ending female genital mutilation (E/CN.6/2010/6).

Also before you are the joint workplan of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (E/CN.6/2010/7), and a Note by the Secretary-General on the strategic framework for the biennium 2012-2013 (E/CN.6/2010/CRP.1).

Members of the Commission will receive, under agenda item 4, a Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the list of confidential communications concerning the status of women, and responses thereto, as applicable (E/CN.6/2010/SW/COMM.LIST/44/R and Add.1).

Under agenda item 5, the Commission has before it a letter from the President of the Economic and Social Council on follow-up to the Council's policy recommendations (E/CN.6/2010/9).

Chair,

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates

I draw your attention to a number of additional reports and documents that are of particular relevance to the work of the Commission at this session, and of the outputs of the Division for the Advancement of Women over the past year.

The *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, on the theme of: Women's control over economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance (A/64/93), was issued last October. The *World Survey* is a five-yearly flagship report of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, mandated by the General Assembly. The theme of the *World Survey* is especially timely in the context of the economic and financial crisis, the food and fuel crises and the challenges of climate change. The report notes the significant development gains to be made in ensuring women's equitable access to and control over economic and financial resources, including in relation to poverty eradication and the wellbeing of families and communities. Conversely, the negative impact of continued gender inequality in access to resources is highlighted as a significant global challenge, with implications at individual, family, community and national levels. It points out the need for appropriate gender-sensitive responses to the multiple crises to increase attention to women's economic empowerment.

I would like to bring to the Commission's attention the report of an Expert Group Meeting convened by the Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with UNDP and hosted by ECE in November last year. The meeting focused on the links between the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of the MDGs. The Expert Group identified key areas of intervention, and presented a series of targeted recommendations to enhance efforts to realize the Millennium Development Goals. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/impact_bdpfa/index.html

Delegations will recall that during last year's session of the Commission, the Deputy Secretary-General launched the Secretary-General's database on violence against women. This first global "one-stop shop" for information on measures undertaken by Member States to address violence against women contains information on legal frameworks; institutional mechanisms; policies, strategies and programmes; preventive measures and training; and services for victims/survivors. The database provides the full text of relevant laws, policies and other documents, where they are available. The database can be navigated in all six official languages of the United Nations, and information within the database is displayed in English and/or the language in which it was provided (www.un.org/esa/vawdatabase). 86 Member States have submitted responses to the questionnaire developed by the Division. I encourage all Member States to contribute information for the database, and to send updates whenever new developments occur. A brochure on the database is available on the website of the Division in all six languages of the United Nations. (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/v-vawbrochure.html>)

Words to Action is a quarterly newsletter produced by the Division for the Advancement of Women, and Issue # 6 is available in hard copy and on the website of the Division.

(<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/Words%20to%20Action%20Issue%20No.%2006.pdf>)

The Division for the Advancement of Women developed and issued a *Handbook for legislation on violence against women*. The Handbook presents recommendations on the content of legislation, together with explanatory commentaries and good practice examples. It intends to provide all stakeholders with detailed guidance to support the adoption and effective implementation of legislation which prevents violence against women, punishes perpetrators, and ensures the rights of victims/survivors. The Handbook is available on the website of the Division in all six languages of the United Nations. (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/v-handbook.htm>)

In collaboration with ECA, the Division convened an expert group in May 2009 which elaborated on recommendations for legislation to address harmful practices against women. The report of the meeting is available on the website of the Division.

(<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/v-egms-gplahpaw.htm>)

As in past years, an update to the Inventory of United Nations system activities to prevent and eliminate violence against women has been completed and is available on the Division's website, as are previous updates.

(<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/v-inventory.htm>)

The Division continued to provide technical assistance to Member States, on request, to enhance their capacity at national level for the promotion of gender equality. In 2009, the Division implemented activities in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Timor Leste, in collaboration with UN entities. Two workshops were held on strengthening legislative frameworks to address all forms of violence against women in December 2009, for 12 African countries.

Chair,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 63/159, I will provide an oral report on the status of women in the United Nations system.

During his term in office, the Secretary-General has been vigilant in increasing the appointments of women at the DSG/USG/ASG levels from 20.7% on 1 January 2007 (45 out of 217) to 24.4 percent as of 31 December 2008 (60 out of 246)¹, an increase of 3.7%. However, women's representation at the lower levels has not kept a similar pace. As of 31 December 2008, the representation of women at the professional level and above in the UN system stood at 38.8 percent -- an increase of 0.8 percent

¹ Latest data from CEB

from the previous year. As of 30 June 2009, women in the UN Secretariat constituted 38.3 per cent² of staff in the professional and higher categories, an increase of 0.7 percentage points since 30 June 2008.

Of note in the Secretariat in the last year was the adoption by the Secretary-General of the Gender Balance Strategy and Action Plan including departmental gender scorecards. Some of the salient recommendations in the gender strategy include (a) updating and strengthening the implementation of policies that positively impact organizational culture and productivity, such as flexible work arrangements; (b) Mechanisms related to the 1999 policy on temporary special measures applicable to the recruitment, promotion and placement of women (ST/AI/1999/9) to be modified to conform to the new staff selection system; (c) increased attention to achieving gender balance at field duty stations; and (d) increased accountability through departmental gender balance scorecards and strengthened gender related indicators in managers' performance evaluations.

It is hoped that commitment of senior leadership, combined with promulgation, implementation and monitoring of appropriate policies, will assist in accelerating progress towards attaining the goal of gender balance in the United Nations system.

Chair,
Excellencies,

Your work and discussions at this session are critical and will help shape policies, strategies and programmes at all levels for the realization of gender equality. Your work will contribute to the outcomes of other events during the year.

My Office and the Division for the Advancement of Women stand ready to support the Bureau and the Commission throughout this very important session.

Thank you.

² Latest data from OHRM