

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

**FIFTY-THIRD SESSION
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**Introductory Statement
by**

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

It is an honour and pleasure to welcome you to this session of the Commission on the Status of Women. I extend a warm welcome to the many distinguished members and observers who came from capitals. Your presence testifies to the importance that Member States accord to the work of this Commission.

My deep appreciation goes to you, Mr. Chairperson, and the other members of the Bureau for your particular contribution to the success of the Commission's work in these past two years. In particular, I commend you on the efficient working methods and the quality of the outcomes which have had impact on gender related aspects of the outcomes of other intergovernmental processes, including the Declaration of the Doha Review Conference and the Accra Agenda for Action, whose gender dimensions were a direct result of the 2008 agreed conclusions of the Commission. In addition, previously, gender aspects had been mainstreamed in the ministerial declarations of the 2007 and 2008 substantive sessions of the Economic and Social Council.

We look forward to the continuation of this pattern in the Economic and Social Council's 2009 and 2010 sessions when the annual ministerial reviews would be devoted respectively to implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments with regard to global public health and gender equality.

The theme of this session - "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS" - is most timely as sharing responsibilities between women and men is critical to women's political, social and economic empowerment. In both developed and developing countries, it is women who assume most of the domestic and care work. A project of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development covering Argentina, India, Nicaragua, Republic of Korea, South Africa and Tanzania, for example, found that the mean time spent by women on unpaid care work was more than twice that of men. In the context of HIV/AIDS, care has become a major source of inequality: it has been estimated that globally, women and girls provide up to 90 per cent of the care needs generated by the illness. The unequal sharing of responsibilities has implications for a

range of policy areas, including political participation, health, social welfare, family, education and labour market.

Women's unpaid work, as a critical societal function must be recognized and efforts intensified to reduce its burden and time. Incentives for men to contribute to these activities are required. Governments must eliminate discrimination against women, and create an environment where men equally share family and caregiving responsibilities. Without equal division of labour between women and men the achievement of gender equality would remain elusive.

Mr. Chairperson,

The fifty-third session of the Commission is taking place at a critical time in the quest for the advancement of women. The year 2010 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women. It is also the year of the review of progress made by Member States, international organizations and civil society in achieving the goals set forth by the Beijing and Cairo Conferences, as well as the Millennium Summit.

The High level event convened by the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly on 25 September last year on the Millennium Development Goals resulted in a raft of commitments on issues ranging from malaria prevention to reforestation. The Danish Government MDG3 Global Call to Action generated significant support for new commitments from Governments to achieve MDG3. It called on all governments to make gender equality and women's empowerment a key issue and to substantially increase domestic resource allocation for gender equality and women's empowerment by 2010; and on bilateral and multilateral donors and others to double Overseas Development Assistance to gender equality and women's empowerment. We must scale up the implementation of MDGs, in particular MDG 3 and fulfill the commitments made.

Second, the unfolding financial and economic crisis, recession in major developed market economies, increasing global imbalances and shrinking credit markets are not only slowing growth of the global economy and undermining efforts towards the development goals, they are also threatening progress in women's advancement. Though incomplete, evidence gathered by the World Bank, UNCTAD, UNDP, ILO and other UN entities during 2008 suggest that women are hardest hit through the losses of employment; further restrictions on access to loans, even micro-loans; reduced wages, income and spending on health and education; worsening working conditions and malnutrition. In export oriented industries suffering from sagging demand, women are losing their livelihoods at the fastest pace. The lack of social safety nets make women, primarily heads of households, particularly vulnerable to economic shocks and financial turmoil.

How can we turn this crisis into an opportunity for women? The Declaration of the Doha Review Conference and the Accra Agenda for Action acknowledged that most of the people living in extreme poverty were women and girls. They stated that addressing inequality in income and opportunity within countries and between states was essential to progress; that gender equality, was amongst the corner stones for achieving enduring impact on the lives and potentials of poor men, women and children; and that both donor and developing countries' policies and programmes must be designed and implemented consistently with international commitments on gender equality.

It is vital therefore that the Conference on the Global Financial and Economic Crisis to be held later this year incorporates gender perspectives in its outcome. Financing for gender equality is crucial

Fourth, the profound impact of climate change and the deterioration of the environment already bear down on women's lives in many places. Since this Commission's expert panel on this theme last year, there is more evidence that women living in communities that are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood are disproportionately more vulnerable to and affected by climate change. Major shifts in rainfall patterns, accelerating desertification rendering land infertile, or sea-level rise inundating farmlands and furthering the spread of disease, make women more vulnerable than men, as they lack access to land ownership, decision-making, resources and training. Moreover, women's household's recovery from natural disasters takes longer. It is therefore critical to infuse a gender

against women and achieving sustainable peace and security. Security Council resolution 1820, which

gender mainstreaming, accountability frameworks, new mainstreaming approaches and strategies, including for UN Country Teams in the One UN pilots; system wide capacity building, creating knowledge management networks and data bases and many other projects.

The Commission will be pleased to note that the United Nations System Staff College and my Office, in cooperation with many UN entities, embarked on the development of a three tiered capacity building programme, which would consist of a basic course for all staff, a more in-depth course for programme staff and a briefing for senior management.

Mr. Chairperson,

Allow me to turn briefly to the issue of the representation of women in the professional and policy-making categories. As of 31 December 2007, the representation of women in the UN system stood at 38.4 per cent in the Professional and higher categories, representing an increase of 1.5 percentage point from 2005. In the UN Secretariat from July 2006 to June 2008, women's share in the same categories increased only by 0.2 per cent from 37.4 to 37.6 per cent.

As indicated in the latest Secretary-General's report on the Improvement in the Status of Women in the UN system (A/63/364) a number of factors account for this slow pace of growth including inadequate accountability, insufficient outreach; low numbers of qualified women applicants; and lack of adequate data on the causes of high attrition rates for women.

Mr Chairperson,

Much progress was made in 2008 in intergovernmental discussions on strengthening of the UN system's work on gender equality and women's empowerment under the able leadership of the Co-Chairs of system wide coherence, Ambassador Paul Kavanagh of Ireland and Ambassador Augustine Mahiga of the United Republic of Tanzania. Member States reviewed and discussed two papers submitted by the Deputy Secretary-General, one on gaps and challenges and another on institutional arrangements to bridge these gaps. They agreed that the current gender architecture of the UN system was fragmented. They acknowledged the inadequate funding, the existing gaps and challenges between policies and their implementation, and the lack of a recognized driver to direct UN activities.

Four options were proposed: the status quo, a fund/programme, a department or a combination of the above – a composite entity. Regrettably, the Assembly was unable to reach consensus on one of the options. In response to General Assembly resolution 62/277, a new paper providing further details on all options while focusing on the composite entity was prepared under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General, based on views expressed by Member States, in close cooperation with UN entities and broad consultation with civil society. The paper will soon be submitted to the President of the General Assembly.

All eyes are on the 63rd session of the General Assembly to take a decision on this critical issue.

I would like to thank the former Co-Chairs of informal consultations on system-wide coherence Ireland and Tanzania and welcome new Co-Chairs, Namibia and Spain, and wish them every success in this challenging but so much needed intergovernmental process. I would like to pay special tribute to the Deputy Secretary-General for her strong commitment to gender equality and her leadership in facilitating consensus among all UN entities on this critical issue.

Finally, I would like to very briefly introduce the report of the Secretary-General on Strengthening the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (E/CN.6/2009/11) prepared in response to resolution 52/3 of this Commission. It summarizes the efforts of INSTRAW to strengthen and expand its training and research activities in the following areas: (a)

