

**Annual Awards Luncheon
National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs**

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I am honoured to participate in the 20th luncheon of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs and delighted that you are holding this event at the United Nations headquarters in New York. The National Association has a prestigious history in promoting women's rights and the empowerment of women. You have gathered a significant group of women leaders for this event. I congratulate the Awardees whose impressive backgrounds, commitments and achievements are an inspiration to us all.

I have been asked to speak on the empowerment of women in the context of the Millennium Development Goals. The imperative of achieving MDG 3 – gender equality and women's empowerment – was highlighted during the recent Secretary-General's High-level Event at the General Assembly on 25 September, in particular through a luncheon organized by the Governments of Denmark and Liberia. The High-level Event was organized to mark the mid-way point for the achievement of the MDGs. At the luncheon, and at the High-level Event itself, a number of Member States renewed commitments on gender equality and presented new and expanded initiatives.

Much more, however, needs to be done to accelerate the pace of change in achieving gender equality – which is increasingly recognized as an important goal in its own right and as critical for the achievement of all internationally agreed development goals.

I would like to focus in my presentation today on achievements in implementation of MDG3 on gender equality and empowerment of women with its specific targets on education, employment and political participation. I will also briefly discuss MDG5 on maternal health which is critical for the empowerment of women, as well as the important goal of eradicating violence against women which – while not included as a specific MDG - is integral to the achievement of MDG3 and all the MDGs.

As the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe eloquently stated at the High-level Event: *“Gender inequality is unfair, undemocratic, unintelligent, unproductive and unhealthy. The fact is that the elimination of gender based discrimination - in every area and in all spheres of life – from education to employment, and from decision-making to health – is a moral imperative and an economic necessity. A society which tolerates inequality is blocking its own social and economic progress.... If we fail in our struggle*

Despite such testimony to the importance of gender equality and empowerment of women, the facts and figures on achievement of the MDGs remain sobering. This is particularly the case for MDG 5 on improving maternal health which is the area where the least progress has been made among all the MDGs. It is unacceptable that in 2008 more than 500,000 women die annually because of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.

Education:

Progress has been made towards the elimination of gender disparities in education, with most gains in enrolment ratios at the primary level, where nearly two-thirds of countries reached gender parity by the target year of 2005. Progress is, however, not fast enough, and gains have been very uneven across regions. Of the 113 countries that missed the target at both primary and secondary levels, only 18 are likely to achieve the goal by 2015. Only 35 per cent of countries have reached parity at the secondary level and 3 per cent in tertiary education. Gender disparities in school completion rates at both primary and secondary level persist in many areas, although there are also significant regional differences.

Accelerated progress towards MDG-3 in the area of education requires making primary school free and compulsory. Measures to increase the safety of girls, reduce the risk of violence and ensure their retention in school include investments in infrastructure (providing schools near communities, separate sanitation facilities for girls, and transportation to and from schools.) Community-level measures to ensure enrolment and retention include awareness-raising, provision of incentives, reducing girls' domestic responsibilities, and preventing early marriage, pregnancy and violence. Measures within the educational system include gender-sensitive curricula and materials, increasing the number of women teachers, and gender sensitization for all teachers and school officials. Investment in gender equality in secondary education must be strengthened as the impacts on the empowerment of women and girls are highest at this level

Employment:

Increasing educational attainment can only be effective as an empowerment strategy if it translates into equality of economic

supportive mechanisms include transparent selection processes within political parties, support from senior political leaders, access to public funding, training for women candidates and elected officials, awareness-raising for the public at large to change social attitudes, and protection from violence. The strength of civil society is critical in mobilizing support for women candidates and elected officials.

Maternal mortality:

Access to reproductive health care is critical for the achievement of all the targets under MDG3 and for women's overall empowerment. Almost all of the more than 500,000 deaths during pregnancy or childbirth reported in 2005 were in developing countries, and 86 percent were in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Improved antenatal care and availability of skilled assistance during delivery are critical to maternal health. More than 40 per cent of births in developing countries are not attended by a doctor, midwife or nurse. The proportion of pregnant women in the developing world

the Millennium Development Goals, with serious costs for victims as well as their families and communities.

Trafficking in women remains an under-documented form of violence against women. While reliable data are lacking, estimates of its scope and its illicit profits attest to the gravity of this massive violation of human rights, and the severe consequences of this crime for the victims are well known.

The links between violence against women and MDG3 and all MDGS should be clear. Violence and the threat of such violence constrain women and girls from availing themselves of educational and employment opportunities and hinder them from

women, denying them equal access with men to productive resources, including land,