

**Opening Remarks by Carolyn Hannan
Director, Division for the Advancement of Women**

**At the parallel event on “Local policies and gender governance towards a caring
society”**

**Organized by the Seoul Foundation for Women and Family
United Nations Headquarters
Tuesday 3 March 2009**

Madame Moderator
Madame Park
Distinguished panellists and participants

It is my pleasure to make introductory congratulatory remarks at this event on “*Local policies and gender governance towards a caring society*” organized by the Seoul Foundation of Women and Family. I congratulate the Foundation, and in particular Madam Park, for this initiative to follow-up the event organized at the 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and to keep the issue of gender equality in cities on the agenda at the Commission.

In August 2007 I attended a conference on “*Global City Strategies for Implementing Policies on Gender Equality*” organized in Seoul by the Seoul Foundation of Women and Family, under the auspices of the Seoul Metropolitan Government. During my visit to Seoul, I was impressed by the many initiatives in support of women undertaken by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the Seoul Foundation of Women and Family and renew my congratulations on this international conference which led to the work here in the Commission on the Status of Women.

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As we discussed last year, the urban environment can be a site of both empowerment and exploitation for women. Cities offer many advantages for women, but there are also many challenges. Compared with rural areas, many cities offer better facilities and services, such as water, transport, education, child care and health care. They provide more opportunities for social, economic, cultural and political participation. Women can also usually access more diverse employment opportunities in cities. There are possibilities to engage in community politics at different levels. Enhanced access to information, including through the media and new information and communication technologies (ICT), is another advantage for women. In cities women can more easily access sports, recreation and cultural facilities.

Urban poverty can, however, negate the potential advantages of cities for women. Women in poor communities do not have the same access to infrastructure – including transport, services and employment opportunities - as more affluent women in the same cities. We also noted last year the importance of recognizing that women are not a homogeneous group and there are significant differences and inequalities between groups of women living in cities, including on the basis of race and age, which must be recognized and given particular attention.

Women are still far from being represented equitably in political and administrative decision-making in urban development. Their voices are not systematically brought into the

consultation and dialogue around city planning. As a result, city institutions, facilities, and services are not always conceived with their needs, priorities and contributions in mind, which can result in, among other things, inefficient public services with inappropriate opening hours.

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I am pleased that the Foundation decided to focus this event on the priority theme of the Commission: “*The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS*”. The priority theme has already generated considerable interest. There are a number of important inter-linkages

embedded in many social institutions and maintain the unequal sharing of responsibilities, to the detriment of both women and men. While stereotypes result in women continuing to shoulder the major burden of household and care work, they also constrain men from taking on more responsibilities, and they deprive families of the benefit of the active involvement of both women and men. The need to focus on men's responsibilities for families in urban planning was discussed at the conference in Seoul in 2007.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has exacerbated the challenges of caregiving, in particular in areas where health systems are failing under the burden of care needs, and where the need for home-based care has increased. Home-based caregivers lack adequate support, are subjected to discrimination and stigma, and because the caregiving is so labour-intensive, are unable to sustain their livelihoods and maintain the wellbeing of their families. The crisis of care in the context of HIV/AIDS has illustrated that, while the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men is important, it will not be sufficient. A range of actors must be also involved in response to caregiving – including governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and international donors. Urban planners have a key role to play in this context in alleviating some of the

Policies, plans, resource allocations and programmes in cities need to more effectively target the particular needs and priorities related to unpaid work and caregiving and aim to ensure more equitable sharing between women and men.

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Let me also briefly take the opportunity to remind you about the United Nations Secretary-General's multi-year campaign to eradicate violence against women: "UNiTE to end violence against women" which will run until 2015, to coincide with the target-date for the MDGs. The Secretary-General has called on all stakeholders to work with him in achieving this critical mission – through increasing global advocacy, strengthening the work at national level, and through the United Nations leading by example. Stakeholders are encouraged to find ways to make visible contributions to the campaign. Violence against women is an important issue in cities. It would be important to find ways to make a significant contribution to the Secretary-General's campaign, highlighting the need to address violence against women and girls in cities.

Thank you.