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Commission on the Status of Women..

Fifty-fifth Session

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Introductory Statement

by

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Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director

UN Women

Madam Deputy Secretary-General,

President of the Economic and Social Council,

Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues and friends,

It is an honour for me to address you on this first day of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and the first session of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Last year, you called for full implementation of the General Assembly's commitment to integrating gender equality into all UN institutions into a new and expanded entity of gender equality and women's empowerment. It is an achievement of this Commission and the many committed advocates for women's rights that the UN Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment - UN Women - is now established and operational. I am privileged to be its first Under-Secretary General and Executive Director.

I extend a warm welcome to all Government delegations, especially those that have travelled from capitals. A warm welcome also to the international organizations, foundations, NGOs and networks and colleagues from the UN system. I would like to express my appreciation to the Chair and the members of the Bureau of the Commission for the diligent organization of this session, the consultations with all member and observer states, and the friends of our stakeholders.

Distinguished delegates

Today I will brief you on the progress that we have made in operationalizing UN women, as well as introduce the main topics of this session of the Commission.

But let me preface this by reminding all of us of the enormous responsibility we have together with you as members of this Commission - to work strategically and visibly to promote our collective quest for gender equality. Development analysts increasingly present evidence that gender equality is critical to economic and social development, peace and security. Around the world, we see more men and men's groups devoting time to protect women's rights and we see more women take their place, making sure, in using new technologies in creative ways,

as we have seen in recent weeks.

Here today are representatives from many countries that have made real progress in increasing women's political representation at national and local levels, in achieving parity in primary education for girls and boys and in reducing the number of maternal deaths. Many of you have worked with your colleagues from government and parastatal institutions to secure passage of new or strengthened laws to penalize domestic violence, to eliminate discrimination in the labour market, to guarantee women's property and inheritance rights.

This Commission is a forum for each of you to share your innovations, your best practices and experiences about what works and how the policy and legal reforms you secure are contributing to concrete changes in the lives of women and girls, as well as of men and boys. It is also the forum where you agree and commit to additional measures to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

At the same time, this forum knows better than others, that despite encouraging examples, this progress is uneven and fragile. As we sit in this room today, there are still too many women and children who are trafficked, too many domestic workers who left their families to live in new places, unprotected by labour laws or policies; too many girls forced to leave school or married too early, too many women and girls who lack access to services, whether agricultural extension, health clinics, affordable transportation or legal aid. And worldwide, there are too few women who are at the decision-making tables when peace, climate change agreements are being negotiated.

The global jobs crisis is still unresolved, and unemployment rates remain well above pre-crisis levels. Millions of workers have been thrown into vulnerable employment, and a growing number of countries have imposed discriminatory measures. In this crisis and indeed we must seize new opportunities and guard against postponing action for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment until better or more stable conditions prevail, until we have tackled the current crisis, until we have progressed further on the road of development. Lack of equality between women and men and discrimination against women impede progress in development, peace and security, and the realization of human rights. Discrimination and inequality are the problem – women are part of the solution, and we must fully fully realize women's potential and creativity for a better future.

The specific challenges of making progress, especially for rural women – in rural areas, in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, is something that we need to hear more about. The ways that women are affected by natural disasters, as well as conflict and displacement and the challenges they face in gaining access to decision-making in every sector are also important topics for this body.

This is why this session is about the challenges that different countries and regions are facing and how we can work together at national, regional and global levels to address these.

These issues have always been crucial to the CSW, but now we have a strengthened entity with UN Women, a new UN entity that has a unique and clear mandate to help ensure a more seamless relationship between the normative guidance provided by Member States and operational activities. That too makes this session of the CSW particularly important, as it is the first opportunity to visualize the links between UN Women and turn these linkages into concrete changes for women and girls.

Distinguished Delegates,

Turning to our progress in making UN Women operational - I see the opportunity to help me understand Member States' priorities vis-a-vis UN Women and ensure that those are reflected in UN Women's first Strategic Plan, which I will present to UN Women's Executive Board this June. The Executive Board of UN Women, which governs the operational aspects of our activities, was elected by the Economic and Social Council last November, and held its first session in December. It will now begin recruiting the senior management team, to take steps for setting up a country-level administrative unit and to start operating as of January 2011.

I wanted to share with you how UN Women will implement the vision on which it is grounded. This is a vision for a world where women and men equal rights and opportunities, and the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment are firmly integrated in the development, human rights and peace agenda.

To meet this objective, UN Women will concentrate work around five core principles: 1) providing demand-driven support to national partners to enhance implementation of international agreements and standards; 2) supporting intergovernmental processes to strengthen the global normative and policy framework on gender equality; 3) championing women's empowerment, championing the rights of women and girls – particularly those who are most excluded; 4) leading and promoting coherence in UN system work on gender equality; and 5) acting as a global broker of knowledge and experience, aligning practice with normative guidance.

In my consultations with many stakeholders, I have heard a number of clear messages: that UN Women must focus on a few issues and achieve visible results; that we must work closely with the UN system, not in competition, but in complementarity on what we have achieved, but improve and expand; deepen our work; and that we must think outside the box – irrespective of our mandate, we must prioritize issues that are critical at country level.

Bearing in mind specific country contexts and capacities, UN Women will focus on five thematic priorities in its operational activities:

- 1) *Expanding women's voice, relationships and participation*, working with partners to close the gaps in women's leadership and participation in different sectors and to demonstrate the benefits of such leadership for society as a whole;
- 2) *Ending violence against women* by enabling states to set up the mechanisms needed to formulate and enforce laws, policies and services that protect women and girls, promote the involvement of men and boys, and prevent violence;
- 3) *Strengthening implementation of the women's convention* through women's full participation in conflict resolution and peace processes, gender responsive budgeting, protection from sexual violence and care for its survivors in accordance with UN resolutions;
- 4) *Enhancing women's economic empowerment* through the review of global economic and environmental policies, in partnership with governments and its bilateral partners, to ensure the full realization of women's economic security and rights, including access to productive assets and full social protection;
- 5) *Making gender equality priorities central to national, local and sectoral planning and budgeting*, working with partners UN Women will establish joint planning, budgeting and statistics.

... previous functions and mandates to ministries, specialized agencies and UN entities to accomplish. We are completing the alignment of the UN system with the new structure and finalizing a field capacity assessment to guide our investments in strengthening our teams at our Country Offices. While this transformation is taking place, we have continued to support all ongoing programmatic commitments and mandates of the former four entities.

There is much more to be done. I hope that we will make the senior appointments very soon to have my management team in place and to ensure our staff in New York are working from one common platform. The “institutional culture change” that we are expecting to generate.

I am very grateful for your enthusiastic support that I have received from so many of you. I would ask that you give us some time, but also that you remain ardent advocates for UN Women to receive the resources necessary to assume its unique role, and, finally, that you hold UN Women and the UN system accountable for meeting the high expectations that you so rightly have.

Distinguished delegates,

Turning to the issues before this session of the Commission:

The issue that will be chosen for the first year – Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's employment and labour market work – could not be more timely. The two reports of the Secretary-General on this theme illustrate how gender stereotypes permeate society, and lead to segregation in the labour market. They also provide examples of measures taken by Governments, civil society and the private sector in various parts of the world, to ensure that women and girls can fully exercise their right to education, that they enjoy greater access to decent work and that they contribute to the development and applying the principles and tools of science and technology.

Analysis, based also on inputs from Member States, highlights five key points:

1. Expanding access to education is not enough – it is crucial to also improve the quality and relevance of education. This can include measures such as prioritizing professional development of teachers, improving learning conditions, and revising school curricula.
2. Gender stereotypes are a root cause of occupational segregation – and must be tackled systematically. Measures can include, revising educational materials and sensitizing teachers, and exposing boys and girls to role models in non-traditional fields, such as female engineers or male kindergarten teachers.
3. However: Education is not enough for women to gain access to decent work – proactive measures are needed to facilitate their transition from school to work, that is, equal access to labour market opportunities. Measures can include job search trainings and gender-sensitive social protection schemes.
4. Women's innovation potential is underutilized – to benefit their communities, empowering women to fully contribute to science and technology knowledge and innovation must become a priority.

Women must be encouraged to have equal access to training and education as well as the new employment and entrepreneurial opportunities generated by ICTs. Women globally are

challenging gender stereotypes about ICTs and how they can be used to support women in ICT research and development. Women are also using ICTs to build awareness, and as recent events have shown so vividly—joining with others to reshape history.

I look forward to a rich exchange of ideas and experiences which will help us reach consensus on a focused set of action-oriented policy recommendations. These agreed conclusions reflect Member States' commitment, but they are only a first step. These commitments must be followed-up at the national level. UN Women and the entire UN system at country level stand ready to work with you to support efforts to implement the agreed conclusions of the CSW.

A second focus of this session is the review of progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child", which this Commission adopted at its fifty-first session in 2007.

We know that ending discrimination and violence against the girl child requires comprehensive strategies that create an enabling and supportive environment for girls, that enables girls fully to develop their potential, enjoy their right to education and live naturally free from violence. What measures have been taken to translate the 2007 agreed conclusions into practice? What was their impact? What strategies have proven effective to ensure girls receive sufficient attention in policy and programme development and resource allocation? How can continuing challenges be addressed? This discussion is an opportunity to address these questions, and to focus on ways to bridge the implementation gap and accelerate action.

The emerging issue selected for this year's session, "gender equality and sustainable development", provides a strategic opportunity for this session to influence debates of global significance. By selecting this topic, this Commission creates an enabling environment to ensure a gender perspective is systematically reflected into the preparation of the report to the Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20), which will be held in 2012.

I am also very pleased that you will give special attention to "eliminating preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and the empowerment of women" in a panel discussion. With the participation of ministers, UN entities and other stakeholders, this discussion will be an opportunity for the Commission to assess progress in addressing maternal mortality, identify good practices and successful interventions as well as ways and means for further accelerating action with the aim of measurably reducing and eliminating maternal mortality and achieving MDG 5. It will also be an opportunity to bring further impetus to implementation of the Secretary-General's Global strategy for women's and children's health.

Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

I would like to call your attention to a number of other things that are before the Commission under this agenda item, including the report on the situation of the disappearance of women and children in the period from October 2009 to September 2010 and the treatment of women, the girl child and the elderly. I also refer you to the joint workplan S/HR/2011/14, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and to the report on the activities of the UN Trust Fund to support victims of violence against women which UN Women manages on behalf of the UN system. The members of the Commission will receive a copy of the Secretary-General's transmitting the list of confidential communications concerning the status of women and responses thereto.

The General Assembly has mandated the Secretary-General to provide an oral report to this Conference on the improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system. As a stimulus for organizational change, this UN's participation responsibility at achieving gender balance and to lead by example, while the current target is gender balance at all levels in all occupational groups by 2020, the UN's target for certain functions is 30 percent. Representatives and envoys of the Secretary-General, we still need to do more. Gender balance has been achieved only at the P-1 and P-2 levels, which constitute 29.4 percent of staff at the D-1 level and above and 27.3 percent at the D-2 and P-3 levels respectively.

A recent survey has identified a number of constraints for reaching gender balance, including inadequate accountability, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms; lack of special measures for gender equality; weak implementation of flexible working arrangements; insufficient outreach, and low numbers of qualified women applicants.

These challenges have highlighted the need for senior leadership sponsorship, enhanced monitoring and accountability, and more rigorous implementation of existing policies, including special measures for women and flexible working arrangements.

UN Women will work to implement the agenda of equal representation of women in the UN system through strategic leadership in coordination, advocacy, policy development, and implementation and accountability.

I hope to meet many of you in the coming two weeks – it is your political will and your commitment that helped to lead to UN Women and we rely on your support to deliver on the priorities of our stakeholders.

As Director of UN Women, I assure you that together with my staff, I will do my utmost to support the critical work of this Commission and in the follow-up to the session, so that you can complete your agenda and achieve the results you are aiming for – in a new era of equality between women and men and boys and girls. This is the goal that must be within our reach; this is why we are here.

Look forward to an inspiring two weeks. Thank you.