

Opening statement

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**Expert Group Meeting on
“The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men,
including care-giving in the context of HIV/ AIDS”**

**Geneva, Switzerland
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Distinguished hosts, experts and observers,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this Expert Group Meeting on “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/ AIDS.” I would like to thank the experts for accepting the invitation of the United Nations Secretary-General to share your expertise on this important topic. I also welcome all other participants who are attending as observers from Government, the

Nonetheless, these recommendations from 1996 provide an important framework for our discussions today.

Prior to each of the annual sessions of the Commission, the Division for the Advancement of Women holds an expert group meeting to ensure access to the latest research and practical experience on the priority theme. This meeting of experts provides a critical opportunity to impact on the Commission's deliberations and the development of the policy recommendations.

In preparation for the Commission, the Division for the Advancement of Women also organizes an on-line discussion to allow women and men who will not be able to participate in the Commission to make a contribution to the discussions and outcomes. From 7 July-1 August 2008, the Division organized an online discussion "Women and men: Equal sharing of responsibilities". A total of 1,243 participants registered for the discussion, the majority of whom were women from Africa, Asia and the Pacific. During the discussion, 340 messages were posted. The report from the on-line discussion is available at this meeting and the Moderator of the discussion will also briefly present an overview of some of the findings later this morning.

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Governments have made a number of international commitments on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men on a variety of issues relevant to the theme of the Commission. These are outlined in the Aide Memoire and in a separate document. I will therefore not go into detail here but will list the most important policy contexts in which this issue has been raised.

The *Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development* (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 noted, for example, that the full participation and partnership of both women and men is required in productive and reproductive life, including shared responsibilities for the care and nurturing of children and the maintenance of the household. The Cairo Programme of Action emphasized male responsibilities with respect to child-rearing and housework. It called for greater investments to lessen the daily burden of domestic responsibilities which falls on women. [Countries were urged to enact laws and to implement policies and programmes which will enable all employees – women and men - to organize their family and work responsibilities through flexible work-hours, parental leave, including maternity leave, policies that enable working mothers to breast-feed their children, day-care facilities, health insurance and other measures.]

The 1995 *Beijing Declaration* emphasized that the equal sharing of responsibilities and a harmonious partnership between women and men were critical to their well-being and that of their families, - and importantly - the consolidation of democracy. The *Beijing Platform for Action* noted that women bear a disproportionate burden of labour and household responsibilities. The Platfo5 TD0 T jbbilituhrence3w(responsi TD0mhe Pl[P

participation in decision-making and for the empowerment of girls. [Girls and young women are expected to manage both educational and domestic responsibilities, often resulting in early drop-out from the educational system. Lack of access to productive resources and inadequate sharing of family responsibilities, combined with lack of or insufficient services such as child care, continue to restrict women's employment, economic, professional and other opportunities and their mobility, as well as women's potential to find the time and develop the skills required for participation in decision-making in wider public forums.]

The fact that the HIV/AIDS pandemic has implications for the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, particularly in the area of care-giving, has also been recognized in the intergovernmental processes. The Beijing Platform for Action recognized the consequences of HIV/AIDS for women's role as mothers and caregivers and for their contribution to the economic support of their families.

The 1996 agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission on child and dependent care, including sharing of work and family responsibilities, already mentioned earlier, highlighted, among other things, that greater participation of men in family responsibilities, including domestic work and child and dependent care, would contribute to the welfare of children, and of women and men themselves.

Five years after the Beijing Conference, the outcome document of the five-year review of progress in implementation of the Platform for Action at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000 also noted the failure to recognize and measure in quantitative terms the unremunerated work of women. The fact that this work is often not valued in national accounts means that women's full contribution to social and economic development remains underestimated and undervalued.

Agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on other priority themes since 1996 have raised the issue of the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. These include the 2004 agreed conclusions on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality which recognized that partnership between women and men was essential to achieving gender equality and called for the creation and improvement of training and education programmes to enhance awareness and knowledge among men and women on their roles as parents, legal guardians and caregivers and the importance of sharing family responsibilities.

The agreed conclusions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, adopted by the Commission in 2007, urged Governments to identify and address the needs of girls heading households, including in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, for protection, access to financial resources, and access to health care and support services, including affordable HIV/AIDS treatment. Measures should be taken to increase men's responsibility for home-based care in order to address the disproportionate burden borne by women and girls in caring for the chronically ill.

and in public life should, in particular, be highlighted. The transferring of the stratification in the private sphere to the public sphere is critical, as is the fact that women's labour at household subsidizes men's dominant roles in the labour market and in the public sector.

current division of responsibilities, it is possible to inadvertently strengthen existing stereotypes, perpetuate or even exacerbate inequalities and reinforce the status quo. Examples that come to mind include policies on parental leave, crèches and work-life balance that often seem to be based on the assumption that women have sole responsibilities for child-care and a failure to recognize the parental responsibilities of men. A transformation of both attitudes and institutional arrangements must be the goal, while at the same time supporting women and girls in their current situations.

This requires an explicit policy recognition of the existing inequalities between women and men and the negative impacts at all levels, and of the fact that this is a gender equality policy issue. It is interesting to note that the main policy rationales for change in this area have not been always explicit in terms of addressing gender inequalities. The rationales have often been primarily focused on the need to address other problems, such as declining fertility or the need to increase women's participation in the labour market for economic reasons.

Addressing inequalities in responsibilities between women and men is complex, requiring a broad policy response because of the interconnectedness of the issue. There are implications for a range of critical policy areas such as health, social welfare, family, education, and the labour market. In Sweden, for example, a former Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, has commented that it will be impossible to get more men to take paternity leave, despite progressive social policies, as long as the wage gap persists between women and men.

A critical element in bringing about change in the sharing of responsibilities between women and men will be engaging men and bringing them along in the process of change. A number of expert's papers address this issue in a very constructive manner. A lot more needs to be done to increase incentives for men, to provide adequate support to their efforts and to directly address stereotypes which work against men's involvement, such as those describing men as deficient care-givers.

I would encourage you to provide very concrete examples of positive change that have taken place in all the areas under consideration, highlighting where possible lessons learned and good practice examples. While it is critically important to highlight the gaps and challenges, a constructive and positive approach will be valuable in illustrating that change is both possible and already underway, and thus also in ensuring that the policy recommendations provided by this meeting will be given sufficient consideration in the Commission on the Status of Women.

Throughout the discussion, I am sure there will be significant emphasis on making the existing inequalities more visible and calling for greater value to be given to work undertaken by women, including care-giving. The changing of attitudes in terms of the importance of and value of this work, and other work done by women, is a huge challenge.

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While there will be many different issues opened up in this discussion – such as the care economy and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, - and it would be easy and tempting to have a very broad general discussion, I would encourage you to keep the focus on the theme before the Commission on the Status of Women - “the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men” - in order to make a meaningful contribution to the work of the Commission in this important area.

This Expert Group Meeting is encouraged to go beyond describing and analyzing problems and challenges to providing concrete policy recommendations on ways to reduce the unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS. These recommendations should be as clear and focused as possible, and where feasible, clearly target relevant actors.

The ten-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action emphasized that reliable data disaggregated by sex was critical, including for gender-sensitive planning and budget allocations. Proposals for possible indicators to measure progress in implementation of priority themes should be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women. The Expert Group Meeting is therefore encouraged to consider possible recommendations on indicators on “the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men.” You may wish to ensure that all working groups set up during the meeting specifically focus on ways to measur