

As delivered

**Opening Address
by
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on
Gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals
at
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Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Dear Delegates,

Thank you very much, Madam Chairperson, for your kind words of introduction. I am the Special Adviser of Mr. Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General, on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. As the title suggests, I advise the Secretary-General on gender issues and issues of particular concern to women and girls so that their needs, interests and aspirations can be taken into consideration and be fully integrated into the overall policy direction and programmes of the United Nations.

I am delighted to address this important Conference on Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Thank you all for your keen interest in the work of the United Nations on gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals. It is particularly encouraging for me to see that your generation shares

The Beijing Conference resulted in a landmark agreement in the history of the Organization, by 189 governments to improve the status of women worldwide. This agreement is known as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It outlines concrete actions to be taken in 12 critical areas in order to achieve gender equality. In 2000, a Special Session of the General Assembly, the twenty-third special session (commonly known as Beijing + 5) adopted an Outcome Document, reflecting issues emerging after Beijing. This document supplements the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

In 1979, the U.N. adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). By ratifying CEDAW, 180 countries have thereby committed themselves to accept it as part of their national laws. Often described as the international bill of rights for women, CEDAW provides for women's equal enjoyment with men of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights. It is unique in establishing legal obligations for States Parties to ensure that discrimination against women does not occur either in the public or in the private sphere.

Therefore, we can comfortably say that the Beijing Platform for Action, the Outcome Document of Beijing + 5 and the CEDAW Convention are the main political and legal pillars for action by Governments, civil society and international organizations, including the United Nations, to achieve gender equality.

Together with outcomes of other major UN conferences and summits held in the 1990s and early 2000, these documents laid the foundation of a new vision of the world. A world free of abject poverty and a world in which all children – girls and boys – are educated. A world in which women and men have equal opportunities to contribute to and share in their country's prosperity and in which better health care for mothers and children removes the shadow of illness and death from childbirth and childhood. A world in which each generation hands on to the next a healthy environment with the resources that will meet the needs for a happy, safe and productive life.

It sounds Utopian. And yet the world's leaders signed up in 2000 to a Millennium Declaration which became an inspiration and basis for a set of eight tough but realistic goals – the Millennium Development Goals - which if they were met would move us very much nearer to making this vision a reality. The Millennium Development Goals which included some goals and strategies of the Beijing Platform offer a set of measurable goals and targets. They are also an important strategic opportunity to integrate the concerns of the Beijing Platform into a wider development policy agenda. However, they do not replace the goals and strategies set forth in the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Millennium Development Goals call for specific action. Goal 1 calls for halving extreme poverty and hunger by year 2015. Goal 2 calls for achieving universal primary education for all girls and boys. Goal 3 calls for promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. Goal 4 calls for reducing child mortality by two thirds. Goal 5 calls for reducing by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio. Goal 6 calls for halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases. Goal 7 calls

for ensuring environmental sustainability by halving the number of people without access to safe drinking water and achieving a significant improvement in the lives of 100 million slum dwellers by year 2020; and finally Goal 8 calls for developing global partnership for development.

The establishment of the specific Millennium Development Goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women (Goal 3) highlights the importance of renewed commitments to reduce the gender gap.

women, trafficking of women and children increases and is estimated at 2,000,000 persons annually; and information and communication gender gap is growing, particularly in developing countries.

It has been noted that progress in achieving MDG 3 on gender equality has been limited and uneven. The world is still far from achieving gender parity in national parliaments, and missed the target of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education set for 2005 with 19 countries missing the target for primary education and 24 countries for secondary education.

Addressing these inequalities and building on the gains made, the world leaders at the 2005 Summit resolved to eliminate pervasive gender discrimination by:

- Eliminating gender inequalities in primary and secondary education;
- Guaranteeing the free and equal right of women to own property and housing;
- Ensuring equal access to reproductive health;
- Promoting women's equal access to labour markets, employment and labour

Last year, the United Nations celebrated its 60th Anniversary and the 10th