

**COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN  
FORTY-NINTH SESSION  
28 February - 11 March 2005**

**Introductory Statement  
by  
Ms. Rachel Mayanja  
Assistant Secretary-General  
Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women  
New York, 28 February 2005**

Madam Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Representatives of Civil Society,  
Colleagues,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to address this session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Allow me to extend a warm welcome to the many distinguished Ministers and high-level representatives who have travelled from their capitals to attend this session of the Commission. Your presence testifies to the importance that Member States accord to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women.

I would like to say a special word of thanks to the Bureau and in particular to you, Madam Chairperson, for your leadership and wisdom in setting the context and tone for constructive dialogue in preparations for this session and commend all members of the Bureau on the efficient way in which the Commission and its inter-sessional activities were managed during the past two years.

I would also like to commend our colleagues from the United Nations system and our partners from the NGO community world-wide for their valuable contributions.

Madam Chairperson,

The forty-ninth session of the Commission is taking place at a critical time in the advancement of women. The year 2005 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and will be the culmination of a long process of change for women which began in Mexico. Thirty years ago, at the First World Conference on Women, the international community emphatically endorsed equality for women as a goal in itself and as a means to achieve peace and development.

In 1995 in Beijing, this consensus was elevated to higher ground when 189 Member States adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Designed as an agenda for women's political and economic empowerment, the Platform's emphasis was not only on achieving equality and eliminating discrimination, but was also on the integration of women as full and equal partners in all policies and decision-making processes.

Madam Chairperson,

The vast majority of Member States, in their replies on the implementation of the Platform for Action, reconfirmed the importance or continuing relevance of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome Document, and remained committed to their full implementation.

It is, therefore, our duty to all women of the world to continue to work hard to implement the Platform for Action and the Outcome Document of Beijing+5 and ensure that there is never any slipping back.

Any rollback on this consensus and the commitments made at Beijing would be a dramatic setback, not only to the cause of gender equality but also to the noble goals of the Millennium Declaration.

Although no country has successfully addressed all critical areas of the Platform, many countries, both developing and developed, have shown that significant progress can be achieved by empowering women and reducing discrimination against women.

Progress has clearly been made in such areas as policy-setting, legislative reform, enhancement of national machineries, increased participation in the economy, higher enrollment of girls for primary education, greater awareness of the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and girls, recognition of the role of women in peace and security, and establishment of more mechanisms for the protection and promotion of human rights of women and girls, including the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW Convention.

However, despite that progress, a large gap remains between policy and practice in gender equality. Gender inequality is deeply entrenched in policies, legislations, attitudes, traditions and societal institutions. The challenges facing us therefore are formidable.

Experience has shown that innovative action is essential to achieving the goals of gender equality and empowerment of women.

We have the blue print for action – the Beijing Platform for Action. The Platform emphasized that Governments have primary responsibility for the implementation of the proposed actions. The success of the Platform for Action will require a strong commitment on the part of Governments, international organizations and institutions at all levels. It will also require “the establishment, of or strengthening of, mechanisms at all levels for accountability to the world's women.”

We must seize the opportunity of the review and appraisal of Beijing+10 and the high-level Plenary Meeting of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly which will undertake a comprehensive review of the progress made in the fulfilment of all the commitments contained in the Millennium Declaration, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to start a new era of implementation.

It is not by accident that, in the Millennium Project report on “Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals” and the companion report of Task Force 3, gender equality interventions are among those that are indispensable for achieving **all** Millennium Development Goals and targets. (Annex 2 of the report).

I invite the Commission to look ahead and prepare ground for linking Beijing+10 and the Millennium+5 reviews, particularly in determining future priorities and programme of work; reenergizing intergovernmental dialogue on gender equality and considering measures for adequate financing. I also challenge the Commission to come up with new approaches to bring our work more in line with the requirements of the era of implementation.

Madam Chairperson,

Preparatory meetings took place in the lead up to this session of the Commission at national, regional and international levels.

The results of this work are, perhaps, particularly visible in the field of women’s rights where Member States’ efforts for the advancement of women are monitored by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Convention obliges States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all spheres of private and public life and ensure that women are granted opportunities on an equal basis with men. Governments are increasingly positioning their efforts to achieve the strategic objectives of the Platform within a framework of women’s rights.

We have not yet reached the goal of universal ratification of the Convention set in the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Convention has now been ratified or acceded to by 179 States, although a growing number of States parties have ratified the CEDAW Optional Protocol. I urge all Member States which have not done so to ratify and accede to both instruments.

In July 2004, ECOSOC had very successful discussions in the context of the review and appraisal of the system-wide implementation of the Council’s agreed conclusions 1997/2 on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations. The resolution of ECOSOC on this item (E/2004/4) emphasized the progress made by the United Nations in gender mainstreaming since 1997.

In this connection, I would like to commend the work of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality composed of the gender focal points within the UN system, which concluded its fourth session last Friday.

In the field of women and peace, the Security Council adopted its Presidential Statement (S/PRST/2004/40) in which it went beyond its previous mandates for implementation of its resolution 1325 (2000) and called, among other measures, for a system-wide action plan on the same subject with timelines and enhanced accountability.

Madam Chairperson,

The Beijing Conference was a critical milestone in the advancement of women. Since then, Member States, international organizations and civil society have responded to the challenges set in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in many strategic and specific ways, and in many critical areas much progress has been achieved.

But, now is not the time to tire or tarry. We have a long way to go.

The centrality of gender equality is increasingly recognized in the new millennium as being at the heart of every issue. The imperatives of making gender equality and empowerment of women a reality remain as strong, if not stronger, as at the time of the Beijing Conference. Swift, bold and uncompromising decisions are needed to search for additional and more effective ways of implementing the Programme for Action.

What we promise, we must deliver.

Let us rededicate ourselves with renewed vigor to the full implementation of commitments already made. I am convinced that, working together in this session of the Commission, with your valuable guidance and all the rich first-hand experiences, we will be able to make further decisive steps toward these goals. My colleagues from the Division for the Advancement of Women and my Office stand ready to assist you in your work and cooperate with the Commission.

I wish you a most productive session and thank you.

\*\*\*\*\*