

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS TO LUNCH EVENT ON FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT
AND THE ECONOMICS OF GENDER**

Doha, 29 November 2008

Thank you Minister Erik Solheim [*Minister of the Environment and International Development of Norway*] for your kind introduction.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome this opportunity to speak with you on the economics of gender. This is an extremely important subject, and I thank Norway for organizing this event.

Millions of women around the world wake up early, cook for the whole family, take care of children and elders, and go out to the fields or markets to work all day. They manage life's greatest hurdles, from birth to sickness to ageing to death. Some economists call this the "caring sector".

Without these contributions, all economic activity would grind to a halt. Yet their work is hard to quantify in conventional terms. It does not result a paycheck. It does not show up in national statistics. But make no mistake: these efforts create deep, lasting value.

Women and girls in the traditional labour market usually earn less than men. And they still do most if not all of the caring work at home. They face a double burden without a double reward.

There is a saying from my part of the world: "Women hold up half the sky". I would go so far as to say that women hold up much more than their share of the sky.

We have a moral imperative to empower women and promote gender equality. But doing so is also one of our most powerful tools for fighting poverty and realizing the Millennium Development Goals. Financing gender equality should have a prominent place on the agenda here in Doha and in our response to the financial crisis.

Many women are concentrated in low-paying jobs with little security. They are often so busy working at home that they do not have time for full-time paid jobs. We need social security systems that take account of these constraints and respond to women's needs.

We must also address a little-known aspect of the “brain drain”: the departure of so many educated developing-country women for opportunity in the global North,, at far higher rates than that of educated men. Developing countries face the real risk of shortages of women leaders.

The Monterrey Consensus provides guidance for investing in gender equality. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has also made important recommendations for achieving this goal.

Measures to empower women may seem like a detour on the road to development. In fact, they are the straightest and surest path to reaching our common destination of a more peaceful and prosperous world.

Thank you.