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Fifty-third Session

11th & 12th Meetings (AM & PM)

**SPECIALIZED AGENCIES,
INTERGOVERNMENTAL, NON-GOVERNMENTAL
GROUPS SUBMIT PROPOSALS**

**FOR IMPROVING WOMEN'S WELFARE, AS
WOMEN'S COMMISSION CONCLUDES GENERAL
DISCUSSION**

As the Commission on the Status of Women concluded its general discussion today, United Nations specialized agencies as well as intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations put forth a wide range of recommendations to protect and promote the rights and well-being of women in all spheres of public and private life.

Stressing the need for policies to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men as an essential component of rural life and agricultural development was the Liaison and Public Information Officer in the New York Liaison Office of the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD). She said the rapid spread to rural areas of HIV/AIDS in the past 10 years had put an added burden on the women and girls who traditionally cared for the sick.

IFAD's joint projects with the Belgian Survival Fund in Africa that focused on HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment as well economic empowerment had enabled rural women and their families in such countries as Zimbabwe, Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya to better cope with hard times. She commended the proposed long-term programme of the Women's Commission, particularly the suggestion that rural women be the focus of the 2012 priority theme. The Commission should also consider the link between rural women's empowerment and greater food security, with the World Bank *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook* providing important input.

The Director of the Bureau for Gender Equality of the International Labour Organization (ILO) worried that the current global financial woes would exacerbate women's "double burden" of holding jobs in the labour market while taking care of chores and relatives at home. By year's end, women's unemployment worldwide would reach 7.4 per cent compared with 7 per cent for men. Helping women better balance work and family life must be part of national policies to achieve decent and productive work for both sexes.

She called on Governments and all other stakeholders to promote ratification and implementation of ILO's Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention No. 156, which called for equal opportunity and treatment for female and male workers with family responsibilities. She also advised them to increase public investment in infrastructure and services to alleviate unpaid work demands on households and to improve working conditions through shorter work days and more flexible hours that gave working parents time off to care for children and sick relatives.

Echoing concerns about the need to maintain a harmonious balance between work and family life, the Permanent Observer of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said that, when a father or mother sought work overseas to support a household, that parent's absence from the day-to-day running of the family brought social and economic problems that were frequently overlooked in migration and development policies. International remittances to developing countries, an estimated \$283 billion in 2008, were often the main income of a receiving family and were usually used for school fees, materials and other daily expenses. However, the long-term absence of a parent could undermine the very objective that led to the migration in the first place.

Also concerned about that trend, an expert in the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See said Governments should adopt migration laws aimed at creating social integration and full protection for immigrant caregivers. Care in itself, she said, must become a topic of public debate, and take on importance in shaping political life.

A representative of the European Women's Lobby agreed, saying caregiving urgently needed a place on the international political agenda, with the right to care recognized as a fundamental human right by the United Nations. Institutional reform, particularly of the gender equality architecture, should strengthen resources throughout the United Nations to ensure that a meaningful gender-equality framework was driven from the top and brought real change on the ground. The Barcelona Targets on Child Care, agreed to by European Union Heads of State during their 2002 summit, must be achieved by 2010, she said, calling for better scrutiny in all countries of the obstacles to meeting those commitments, particularly as they related to accessibility, affordability and quality. She also called on Governments to adopt gender budgets in their national financial and economic recovery plans to ensure long-term investment in care.

The Asia Pacific Caucus felt that creating a climate in which men and women shared caregiving responsibilities could transform the lives of many women for the better, its speaker said. But legal frameworks and societal attitudes rooted in culture, tradition and customary practices discriminated against women and restricted their rights. The Commission's agreed conclusions currently failed to reflect the need for community-controlled and culturally-appropriate responses to the unequal sharing of responsibility between men and women, and to acknowledge the financial crisis' impact on achieving gender equality. She urged States to lift their reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, conduct national analyses of women's contribution to caregiving and its role in the economy, and institute effective laws and policies to increase women's political participation and funds for women's leadership.

During the general discussion, the Minister for Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women and Children of Guinea spoke, as did senior officials of Cambodia and India.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Costa Rica, Papua New Guinea, Guyana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Peru, Venezuela, Cameroon, Slovenia, Colombia, Switzerland, Saint Lucia, Bangladesh, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bolivia, Armenia, Tuvalu, United Arab Emirates, Nicaragua, Haiti and France.

The Director for Equality Between Men/Women, Action against Discrimination, Civil Society of the European Commission also made remarks.

Also speaking were representatives of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Centre for Gender and Social Development (on behalf of United Nations regional commissions).

Representatives of the Africa Women's Caucus, organizations of Ecumenical Women, Western Asia Caucus, Human Rights Advocates, the International Network of Liberal Women, Women International Democratic Federation, Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice, Salesian Missions (Salesians of Don Bosco and VIDES International), and the International Federation of Woman Lawyers also made statements.

The Commission will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 11 March, to continue its work.

Background

The Commission on the Status of Women met today to continue its general discussion on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

General Discussion

KHIEU SEREY VUTHEA, Director-General in charge of Social Development in the Ministry of Women's Affairs of Cambodia, associating herself with the statement by the Non-Aligned Movement and the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, said her Government was committed to a policy of gender equality. The Ministry of

Women's Affairs was part of the national machinery for women's empowerment and had established a five-year strategy for developing and monitoring policies for women. That plan focused on health, education, economic empowerment and women in decision-making, among other things, and incorporated rights identified in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

She said greater awareness of women's rights was evident in Cambodia, and perceptions of women were changing. More women were entering into the paid workforce, notably in the Government sector. Women's share of employment had achieved parity in agriculture. However, gender disparity in employment remained, and women's illiteracy in the workforce was evident in their low-representation in higher-level decision-making positions. Policies were being developed to assist women migrants. There were still fewer girls than boys in education; overall, the mean level of education was low. While the overall life expectancy had increased, the maternal mortality rate was "unacceptably" high. The HIV/AIDS prevalence had dropped to 0.9 per cent in 2006 from past years. The major mode of transmission was from husband to wife.

RANDALL GONZALEZ (Costa Rica) said equitable sharing of responsibilities between men and women was needed to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment and depended on effective implementation. It was necessary to attack the root causes of inequality through legislative reforms in key sectors like education and health and to transform the status quo, which had perpetuated inequalities and an unequal balance of power. The economic and social costs of inequality were clear. The present financial crisis and the increase in prices of food and energy had exacerbated poverty in the developing world and continued to be an obstacle to gender equality there. The international financial system must be restructured to ensure economic stability as well as to foster change that would benefit all, and not a mere few.

He said that the current circumstances made it all the more urgent to help sustain social advances in developing countries, particularly as they concerned achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Gender perspectives should be duly considered in the discussion on financing for development, including during the upcoming Global Financial Conference on the economic and financial crisis. Gender equality was a basic human right, a fundamental value and an issue of social justice, and it was essential for economic growth, poverty reduction, environmental sustainability and efficient development. Gender issues must be included in development and financing for development policies, and there must be adequate resources to support those policies. Costa Rica was committed to gender equality and women's empowerment.

ROBERT G. AISI (Papua New Guinea), associating himself with the Pacific Islands Forum, said his country had made strong progress in the area of women in decision-making, notably in the increased number of women in senior management positions in both the public and private sectors. In the area of good governance, the law allowed for women's representation in local and provincial Governments. In the national Parliament, there was only one woman member, out of 109 members; she was serving her third term and was the Minister responsible for women.

He said efforts were being made to redress that imbalance, for which the Government was working with the National Council of Women and Women in Politics Association and had recently adopted a measure for that purpose. To increase the number of women in Parliament, women had successfully pressured the Government to use section 101 of the Constitution to nominate three women to such posts. If Parliament passed that proposal on Tuesday, the number of women Parliamentarians would rise to four. In addition, there would be "reserve seats" for women only, which would be contested in the 2010 general elections. In that context, he thanked the country offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), among others, for their technical and financial support. On the equal sharing of responsibilities, he cited an impact assessment of a pilot project, which underscored that caregivers be required to receive specialized training to enhance their good work.

GEORGE TALBOT (Guyana) said the National Policy on Women in Guyana had been approved in 2006. It had among its objectives the elimination of stereotypes in terms of men's and women's roles in caregiving. It was acknowledged that the mutual sharing of parenting and domestic responsibilities could have a beneficial effect on the fulfilment by women of their potential as mothers, workers, professionals, and corporate and political leaders. Homes headed by single parents often needed special support. Guyana's Government was implementing a plan to provide material aid to men and women in that situation and to provide them with personal development skills. Women had generally borne the brunt of caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS. But they, too, found themselves increasingly in need of care. Guyana's Government was taking action to address the norms and gender stereotypes associated with sexual responsibility and decision-making. Care and support programmes assisted people with HIV/AIDS and their families, and included skills training.

He said that sustained and systematic interventions had helped to reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, sensitize women and girls on how to prevent HIV transmission and promote their access to health care, including reproductive health services. Violence against women must be eradicated. In 2008, his Government pursued a national policy to end such violence under the theme “break the cycle-take control”. It aimed to strengthen prevention mechanisms and increase protection and services for affected women. Sexual offences legislation was before the Parliament. It aimed to reform the law, strengthen protection and improve support and services for sexual violence victims, while also ensuring the rights of perpetrators to a fair trial.

MAFIROANE E. MOTANYANE (Lesotho), associating himself with the statement of the Group of 77 and China and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said his country was working to ensure that gender equality remained at the centre of all its development interventions, with laws and policies providing a platform for good practices. In 2003, Lesotho had adopted a gender development policy that recognized gender inequality as a major challenge. It had promulgated the Sexual Offences Act, which protected women against all attacks of a sexual nature, the positive impact of which Act could not be overemphasized.

Detailing other measures, he said that, as the patriarchal nature of Lesotho’s society had influenced its division of labour, Lesotho had enacted the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act in 2006, which addressed gender inequality and the protection of women’s equal property rights. To fulfil its international obligations, Lesotho worked to enhance women’s participation in governance and decision-making structures. In local Government, 30 per cent of the women’s representation quota was “far surpassed” in the last election, and women counsellors now constituted 58 per cent of all Councils. The Government had achieved 50 per cent representation in the judiciary, and 41 per cent in the Cabinet. Regarding HIV/AIDS, Lesotho sought to address women’s unequal burden in caregiving by remunerating village health workers who provided home-based care.

HADJA MAFOULA SYLLA, Minister for Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women and Children of Guinea, said Guinea’s new National Council for Democracy and Development was committed to protecting vulnerable populations in general, including women and girls. Guinea was also committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals related to women’s advancement and gender equity. Education in Guinea was obligatory and free, ensuring girls the same access to schooling as boys. Guinea had created a Gender Equity Committee. It was working with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to make health a priority in national development. To address HIV/AIDS prevalence in the country, effective measures were being launched, such as the elaboration and adoption of a law to prevent HIV/AIDS and

to provide treatment and counselling to those affected with the disease. Guinea had also set up a national committee and sector-specific committees to address the scourge.

She said her Government had also promoted HIV testing services and psycho-social support for women and girls, and it had a strategic plan to combat the feminization of HIV/AIDS. It was also implementing programmes for preventing and raising awareness about the disease among youth. Such programmes had been made possible with the support of bilateral and multilateral partners. Guinea was committed to combating the scourge by providing care for families. She stressed the importance of ending the unequal sharing of responsibilities between men and women. Guinea was determined to work with the international community to find effective solutions to create a better balance in that regard.

JOEL M. NHLEKO (Swaziland), associating himself with the statements of the Group of 77 and China and the Southern African Development Community, said his country had acceded to the Women's Convention in 2004. It was also a party to the SADC Gender and Development Protocol. Moreover, Swaziland's Constitution entrenched provisions pertaining to equality, non-discrimination and women's rights. Regarding national legislation, the Government was reforming key laws that impacted women's rights, including the 1964 Marriage Act and the 1968 Deeds Registry Act. To address gender-based violence, Swaziland was working with civil society organizations to enact the Domestic Violence and Sexual Offences Act.

In the area of caregiving, he said Swaziland supported the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. Women and girls bore the major responsibility for domestic chores, with women providing 90 per cent of all care and support for those with HIV/AIDS. In 2006, HIV/AIDS prevalence was 38.6 per cent, slightly lower than 42.6 per cent in 2004. Men, on the other hand, were expected to generate family assets, provide shelter and political leadership. Caregiving had "enormous" implications for women's health: their days were long days and they had little or no social security rights. Challenges persisted, but his Government remained committed to gender equality and women's advancement.

LUIS ENRIQUE CHAVEZ (Peru) stressed the importance of the equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women. Peru's constitutional and legislative framework aimed to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and fight gender stereotypes, including in political, economic and social areas. The Equal Opportunity Law and national and political norms covered the principles of equality for

men and women. The Equal Opportunity between Men and Women Plan for the 2006-2010 period included concrete aims to combat stereotypes; it guaranteed the equal treatment of men and women and promoted civil society involvement. Women's observers in the poorest regions of the country worked to monitor and improve the situation of women and girls. Such observers worked with the State, civil society and universities in that regard. Violence against women limited progress in society. Overcoming it was a national priority for Peru.

In 2007, Peru's emergency centres for women provided assistance to 30,000 victims of domestic violence, he said, adding that there was a comprehensive plan in place to end sexual violence, which was implemented in coordination with the Women's Ministry. Education was a main way of ensuring gender equality, and the Peruvian Government had set up a national education project to avoid gender discrimination in the educational system and keep girls in poor regions, particularly rural areas, in school. Inequality in the labour force was also an area of concern. In order to promote the inclusion of women in the labour market, the Government had set up a nursery programme for children under age two. Private institutions had also set up care centres. The Government was using a time-use survey to analyse the division of labour between men and women, in order to better balance work and family responsibilities. Its findings were being incorporated into the national statistics.

LORENA GIMÉNEZ-JIMÉNEZ (*Venezuela*), associating herself with the statements of the Group of 77 and China, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Rio Group, said the financial crisis had created unforeseen challenges. The International Labour Organization had estimated that women were most affected by unemployment. In 2008, women constituted 40.5 per cent of the labour force, compared with 39.9 per cent in 1998. In that context, Venezuela appealed for democratized solutions to today's global situation and for the establishment of a new economic system that placed the human being at its centre.

Highlighting national efforts, she said that, between 2002 and 2007, Venezuela had reduced poverty from 51 per cent to 28 per cent. Also during that time, the unemployment rate had dropped from 11 to 7.4 per cent, thanks, in part, to social policies. On gender violence, power relations between men and women were a tool to affirm men's domination. Violence was universal, and intervening against it was everyone's responsibility. Venezuela had promulgated the organic law of women's rights to a life free from violence, which outlined the establishment of courts for gender-based violence. Regarding domestic work, Venezuela had enacted a law on social protections for housewives, which protected unpaid housewives and took into account their caregiving responsibilities. In closing, she reaffirmed the need to implement

commitments to devote 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) to official development assistance (ODA).

TOMMO MONTHE (Cameroon) said a Government strategy had been launched to eliminate gender inequality and promote an equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, including the caregiving of people with HIV/AIDS. It worked to promote the equal participation of men and women in public life in connection with the Millennium Development Goals. His Government had also taken action to improve gender equity in all key sectors of public life, including education, health and employment. Measures had been adopted to strengthen prevention of and raise awareness about gender equality, in order to overcome the psychological effects on women. Those steps were also aimed at ending harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation. Measures for health education and environmental management had also been adopted, such as providing antiretroviral drugs free of charge.

He said his Government was implementing public health strategies through several programmes, including projects aimed at health financing, reproductive health for adolescents and drug treatment. A sectoral plan for women and families had been drawn up in the context of the feminization of the pandemic. The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate was 6.8 per cent for women and 4.1 per cent for men. The Government had implemented plans to train medical staff on how to best address HIV/AIDS cases, prevent new infections among women, strengthen action to target military personnel and truck drivers, who frequented prostitutes; and reinforce the capacity of families to care for people living with HIV/AIDS. In her role as Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Cameroon's First Lady was involved with several organizations that aimed to promote women's empowerment and gender equality.

SANJA ŠTIGLIC (Slovenia) said that the interrelationship between equal sharing of caring responsibilities with sexual and reproductive rights, the right of women and girls to be free from any form of violence against them, and their social and economic rights to participate in all spheres of influence and decision-making process should be adequately addressed. When women were compelled to have more children than desired, their burden of caring increased, and inequalities between women and men were exacerbated. In the majority of cases, limitations on women's choice in matters of sexuality and reproduction reflected the attitude that women had to accept their biological roles as mothers and consequently their responsibility for the rearing of children and caring for family and household work.

She said the benefits of sexual and reproductive health and rights and services for equal sharing of responsibilities and for improving women's social position should be taken into account in every effort taken towards narrowing the gender gap in sharing of responsibilities and division of caring work. So should women's contribution to economic growth, poverty reduction, prevention of discrimination and social stigma of women and girls affected by HIV/AIDS and their expanding participation in decision-making. The Government of Slovenia believed that better protection of women's economic and social rights constituted a major tool to eliminate inequalities between women and men in regard to paid employment, division of household responsibilities and care work.

CLAUDIA BLUM (Colombia), associating herself with the statements of the Rio Group, the Group of 77 and China and the Non-Aligned Movement, said women in her country had strengthened their active participation in public and productive life. Colombia was committed to implementing development policies, with a view to gender equity and equality of opportunities. Strengthening programmes of care for dependent persons was another key measure to support women and men in carrying out household responsibilities. In that context, she highlighted such programmes as "Community Homes" and "Children's Homes". Other programmes impacted family welfare, such as the "school restaurants" programme.

At the same time, the Government encouraged the adoption of action plans by the private sector to facilitate the equitable distribution of family responsibilities among employees, she said. Twelve national business associations, along with the President, last year had signed the "Agenda for Labour Equality", committing themselves to adopting measures for eliminating discrimination. In 2002, Congress approved the first law on paternity leave, and national systems had been strengthened to make men's and women's roles in households more visible. Women's position in high State positions continued to expand. In 2008, in the executive branch, 23 per cent of ministries, 29 per cent of vice-ministries and 50 per cent of presidential programmes were headed by women. The adoption of law 1257 last year strengthened the regulatory framework for awareness, prevention and punishment of violence. With the 2006-2010 national development plan, public policies for democratic security and social equality had positively impacted women's advancement.

JEAN-DANIEL VIGNY (Switzerland) said his country was convinced that equal sharing of responsibilities, particularly the equal sharing of paid and unpaid work

between women and men, improved the situation of women in society and was essential for achieving gender equality. At the same time, the Government was aware that unpaid care work had been neglected in economic analysis for a long time and that it had been difficult to get reliable representative data on the amount of unpaid care work and on the way it was distributed between women and men. Several data collections and studies concerning those issues had been conducted. One of the most comprehensive and recent time-use survey on the care economy in the country had been undertaken as part of the project “Political and Social Economy of Care”, and its results showed that childcare and looking after adults requiring care in Switzerland was largely done through unpaid work. More than two thirds of that work was done by women.

Additionally, he said, Switzerland had steadily increased the number of family care options in recent years and also planned to carry out a fundamental reform of the taxation of married couples and families. As a result, families with children would benefit from tax relief. His country considered it urgent to put the gender perspective of the financial crisis and the economic recession on the agenda of the Commission’s session and it shared the concerns about the expected disproportionate impact of the crisis upon women and girls worldwide.

SARAH FLOOD-BEAUBRUN (Saint Lucia) said that Saint Lucia, like many nations with similar socio-economic issues, had a dearth of information with regard to the sharing of caregiving between men and women in the context of HIV/AIDS. She welcomed any relevant research that focused on that, as well as the role played by the elderly in the family. In 2008, all infants born to HIV-positive mothers in Saint Lucia received an HIV test within 12 months of birth. No infants born to HIV-positive mothers were HIV-positive, themselves, owing to vigorous efforts to prevent mother-to-child transmissions. Women had traditionally borne the burden of caring for sick family members. Hence, the equal sharing of responsibilities was important. In Saint Lucia, there had been a shift, whereby men had taken on a greater role in caregiving within families. Saint Lucia had also implemented a strategy to change behaviour to help destigmatize HIV/AIDS.

She said that the Saint Lucia National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan was the guiding framework for responding to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The Plan was closely aligned with the Pan-Caribbean’s Regional HIV/AIDS Strategic Framework. It involved advocacy, policy and development; comprehensive HIV/AIDS care for all persons living with the disease; preventing further transmission of HIV; strengthening national capacity to deliver an effective, coordinated and multisectoral response to the epidemic. It was funded largely by the Government, the World Bank and the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Saint Lucia was

working with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Bank to assess the current plan and to develop a new strategic plan for the 2010-2014 period, including an action plan for the first year.

ISMAT JAHAN (Bangladesh), associating herself with the statement of the Group of 77 and China, said the equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women was critical to women's economic, social and political empowerment. Although the share of women in paid work had grown significantly in recent times, women continued to bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid work such as caregiving and domestic responsibilities.

In the context of HIV/AIDS, she said that caregiving had become a major source of inequality since it was estimated that globally women and girls provided 90 per cent of the care need generated by illness. That had brought to the fore the need for increased involvement of all stakeholders in care work and the weaknesses and inadequacies of public policies and institutions in that regard. Concerted efforts were required to enhance the involvement of men and boys in household work and caregiving, thereby facilitating the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities for both men and women. She also believed that the increased share of care responsibilities between men and women alone was not enough to address the persistent challenges of caregiving. What were called for were sound public care policies integrated into overall policy development.

KIRAN CHADHA, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child of India, associating herself with the statement of the Group of 77 and China, noted that the Beijing Declaration stated that the equal sharing of responsibilities was critical to family well-being. In India, the cultural reality was that women and girls were caregivers, and resources must be allocated to them, including in the area of adequate social infrastructure. The challenges of women and girls were increased in families affected by HIV/AIDS, and included a lack of men's involvement. Care work must be measured and valued, and systematically integrated in to all policies, especially those for health, education and employment. Moreover, there was a need to integrate gender perspectives in national HIV/AIDS programmes.

She said the negative fallout from the global economic and financial crisis had disproportionately impacted women and girls, particularly as they often were forced to take up jobs that lacked security, or were under-remunerated. Domestically, she stressed the need for regional and international cooperation. Developed countries should augment their contributions to international and bilateral assistance. Also, the international

community should provide new and additional resources, technical transfer and capacity-building. The shortages in official development assistance flows, and its negative impacts on gender financing, must be seriously addressed. Women's empowerment positively impacted men's and children's lives, and reduced child mortality rates. She highlighted a self-help programme in India that emphasized economic empowerment by ensuring women's access to and control over resources. A focus on empowering women through gender equality would contribute to countries' development.

WAHEED ABDULWAHAB AHMED AL-SHAMI (Yemen) said there was no doubt that the past few decades had witnessed a growing interest in women's rights. That was evident in the adoption of many international conventions and the convening of many international meetings related to women's empowerment. They had led to progress in many respects; however, numerous impediments to women's advancement remained and much still needed to be done. States must redouble regional and national efforts to advance women's status. He reiterated Yemen's commitment to women in that regard; his Government guaranteed and promoted women's rights. It had signed and ratified the Women's Convention in 1984, as one of the first countries to have done so. It had presented its sixth periodic report to the monitoring Committee in July. Yemen had ratified numerous other women's rights conventions and it sought continuously to amend any discriminatory laws.

He said that the Civil Status Code had been amended to raise the minimum legal age for marriage to 17. Yemen's Government had set up institutional mechanisms, such as the Supreme Council for Women, the National Women's Committee and the Ministry of Women's Rights. It had also formed numerous departments and institutions for women's advancement. About 200 organizations addressed issues concerning women, family and children. Yemen sought to guarantee the role and position of women at all levels of decision-making. Yemen had women ambassadors, lawyers and parliamentarians. Vigorous efforts had been made to guarantee and promote women's rights in the social, political and economic spheres. Still, obstacles to gender equality existed. He reiterated his concern over the state of women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and urged the international community to strive to eliminate their suffering and put an end to the occupation.

ASEIL AL-SHUHAIL (Saudi Arabia), outlining national measures to promote women, said her Government had created programmes and national strategies to promote women and development. Units that provided services for women had been created in all areas of Government, and her country noted the importance of strengthening women's role in Government participation. Women

participated in governance programmes, and various sections in a Ministry of Labour report were dedicated to women.

She said the Government had adopted a strategy to strengthen women's role in all areas of development, and had adopted measures in education, health and in national dialogue. In addition, eight women had been appointed to the Senate. Women had become heads of universities. To guarantee women's participation in sustainable development, she highlighted Government efforts to encourage the private sector to adopt social programmes. Women had been appointed to the Council of Administration. Awareness-raising in the area of health was being carried out in partnership with the private sector. Regarding Saudi Arabia's programme to combat HIV/AIDS, AIDS testing took place before marriage. In 2005, 311 cases had been detected; prevalence among men was 3 versus 1 for women. In the current global context, her country attached importance to women's participation and had adopted various gender equality initiatives.

MOHAMMED AL-ALLAF (Jordan) said Jordan was committed to gender equality and women's empowerment in the framework of the Women's Convention. It was also committed to improving women's socioeconomic situation. Jordan was proud of its cooperation with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and it hosted UNIFEM's regional bureau in the Middle East. That cooperation arrangement was a model to be followed. Jordan promoted women's empowerment in all areas. The equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women was the foundation for the family. Mutual care was a shared responsibility. In the world's current socioeconomic circumstances, it was fundamental that men and women worked outside the home. Also essential was to enable women to be at the heart of decision-making processes. Jordan was committed to international instruments on women's rights and was working to review discriminatory national legislation and to abolish it. It was reviewing its labour laws with that in mind.

He emphasized the need to re-establish equality and to do away with gender stereotypes and discrimination. Jordan's Government had created day-care centres and centres for the care of the elderly. It had increased investment for care facilities and other programmes at affordable prices, while providing training for caregiving. National initiatives promoted gender equality. Jordan's amended labour laws granted working women paid maternal leave before the birth of a child and for a year afterwards. Women were also entering leadership posts. Four women ministers had been appointed, and seven women had become deputies in Parliament. Seven more had been appointed to the Senate; several women had obtained posts in the judiciary; and four women had become ambassadors. Jordan had recently cancelled

its reservation to article 14 of the Women's Convention, which concerned travel. As a result, women could more easily and freely travel and choose their place of residence.

INGRID SABJA (Bolivia), associating herself with the statements of the Group of 77 and China, the Rio Group and the Non-Aligned Movement, said the situation for women in her country was still very difficult. In rural areas, women were subjected to discrimination and various forms of social segregation. Women's rights were integral to universal human rights. She noted that 25 articles of the Constitution incorporated principles of equality, and sought to open areas for women in political life. Bolivia had adopted a cross-cutting approach to gender, including through transparency and a redistribution of social products. A new Constitution guaranteed the right to life without violence. Labour legislation promoted women's incorporation into work life, and equal pay for equal work.

In the area of natural resources, she said Bolivia recognized women's land ownership as key to fighting poverty. A national plan for equal opportunities sought cooperation among different peoples and urged intercultural cooperation without any distortion of power. There had been an increase in HIV/AIDS, which was closely related to extreme poverty. Disease prevalence was greater among women. The national Congress had adopted a law that guaranteed the rights of those living with the disease, and sought to improve programmes for comprehensive care of the sick. In addition, it sought to prioritize education for prevention. Highlighting the "Silence Means Death" campaign, she said everyone was responsible for confronting the problem with tangible results.

ANI KOCHARYAN (Armenia) said the referendum of 2005 adopted amendments to the Constitution that not only preserved provisions that prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex and that secured equal rights of women and men, but they also improved provisions to protect the family, maternity and children. The National Programme adopted for the 2004-2010 period set priorities and the basic direction of the current State policy for resolving women's issues, including equal rights and opportunities at the decision-making level in the public and political sphere, promoting the socio-economic status of women, improving women's health, and combating trafficking in women and girls. The National Programme also sought to eliminate poverty within the framework of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which was recently revised to reflect advances made in the field. One section of the Programme called for continued interaction with the mass media to overcome prejudices and stereotypes and to modify social and cultural patterns of conduct.

She noted that, in January, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had discussed Armenia's third and fourth periodic report. The Committee's concluding observations and recommendations would become part of the Government's future efforts to improve gender equality. Women had equal political rights under the law, but, in reality, they were still insufficiently represented in decision-making. A Government priority was to combat trafficking in women, and no efforts were spared to defeat it with prevention, prosecution and protection. In December 2007, the Interagency Commission was raised to the level of the Council on Trafficking Issues headed by the Deputy Prime Minister. In 2008, the Government approved the national referral mechanism for victims of trafficking, which set up a system for coordination between State bodies, local authorities and specialized non-governmental organizations on issues relating to assistance for trafficking victims.

STEPHEN HOMASI (Tuvalu), associating himself with the Pacific Islands Forum, said his country was fully committed to intensifying efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of the International Conference on Population and Development, among other international instruments. Women's involvement in HIV/AIDS decision-making at national and community levels had increased, but political representation remained very low. Tuvalu was committed to scaling up efforts towards the goal of universal access to comprehensive prevention, treatment and care. Home-based caregiving for patients was a full-time occupation, however, fear of stigma and discrimination caused many women to provide care in secrecy, which led to their further isolation and that of those who needed care.

He said gender inequality was a key driver of the pandemic. Women and adolescent girls were especially vulnerable, owing to their economic and social inequalities, and culturally accepted roles, which placed them in subordinate positions to men in decision-making. As such, Tuvalu welcomed any assistance from the United Nations or others, to address the delicate issues surrounding gender, HIV/AIDS and culture. Also, climate change was the most serious threat to the global security and of enormous concern to small island States like Tuvalu. As such, it was crucial that climate change be mainstreamed as a cross-cutting and emerging issue in the framework of gender and HIV/AIDS. He reaffirmed Tuvalu's full commitment to create an enabling environment for women's empowerment.

AMAL AL-JARMAN (United Arab Emirates) said his country had accomplished concrete achievements in all areas of gender equality, notably in education where the

percentage of girls enrolled in elementary schools was close to that of boys, while in higher education, girls surpassed boys, comprising 77 per cent of the total number of university graduates. The number of women holding Masters and doctorates was on the rise. In terms of employment, the State encouraged women's entry into the labour market, while working to remove any barriers in their way to work in any job for which they were qualified. Women now constituted 22.4 per cent of the total national work force. They occupied 66 per cent of jobs in the public sector, of which 30 per cent were leading and decision-making positions, including membership in boards of the chamber of commerce and industry.

He said that, in order to facilitate equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, including caregiving for children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled, the Government had taken a number of legal, social and economic steps and initiatives to alleviate the burdens of caring for the family, most of which were carried out by women, thus allowing them to work productively outside the home. It was also encouraging fathers' participation in caregiving. In addition to women's representation in the executive and legislative bodies, women had begun to participate in the judiciary through their assignment, for the first time, as a judge and a prosecutor, which represented a strong expression of the belief in women's role in decision-making, he explained.

MARIA RUBIALES DE CHAMORRO (Nicaragua) said the current economic, financial and food crises had increased women's dependency level and had threatened the achievement of the gender-related Millennium Development Goals. The equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women was necessary. Nicaragua had continued to make progress in meeting its commitments in line with international instruments. Gender policy was aimed at achieving women's rights by going from rhetoric to practice based on 12 strategic cross-cutting guidelines. Nicaragua had an equal rights and equal opportunities law. The Government had incorporated a gender perspective into public-sector planning to assist indigenous women, most of who lived in poor, rural areas. Such programmes allowed Nicaraguan women, many of whom were single parents, to become agents for development. The "zero hunger" programmes provided food vouchers to help families and the "zero user" programmes gave credit to women at fair interest rates.

In 2008, she noted, Nicaragua had achieved a school retention rate of 94 per cent. The National Literacy Campaign reduced the illiteracy rate by 6.8 per cent. Nicaragua's maternal mortality rate had dropped from 90.4 per cent per 100,000 live births to 56.9 per cent. The Government had also invested in child development centres for children of working mothers. It had established policies to ensure equal pay for equal work for women. Women now held high-level posts in the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of the Interior, the National Police and the

Migration Police, areas which were formerly run only by men. To combat domestic violence, the national police had 32 police commissioners to help women and children victims of such violence. As a new member on the Women's Commission, Nicaragua was committed to gender equality and women's empowerment at the national and international levels.

ANNALISA SACCÁ, expert in the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See, said caregiving involved programmes, policies and budgetary decisions, as well as a personal commitment to the well-being of others. The interrelatedness of activity and personal attitude was self-evident, but not always to be presupposed. Focusing on care and sharing responsibility led to thinking of the relationship between men and women as interdependent. Overcoming of the dilemma between autonomy and dependence favoured a new vision of care work that could no longer be attributed to certain groups only, such as to women and immigrants, but must be shared among all.

Regarding HIV/AIDS, she focused on the primary and best meaning of care. HIV/AIDS called into question the values by which people lived their lives and how they treated — or failed to treat — each other. Home-based care was the preferred means in many social and cultural settings, and was often more sustainable in the long-term, when based in communities. Unfortunately, such care was largely unrecognized and many caregivers often faced precarious financial situations. Better support for them must be provided. Moreover, Governments should properly recognize that the budget and organization of public institutions were somewhat relieved by family-based caregiving, and thus adopt migration laws aimed at creating social integration and full protection for immigrant caregivers. Care in itself must become a topic of public debate, and take on an importance in shaping political life.

LUCA DALL'OGGIO, Permanent Observer of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) observed that countries of origin were increasingly dependent on the significant amount of remittances provided by immigrants, and saw their overseas workers as of major value to their economic development. However, spouses and children left behind and the absence of a parent from the day-to-day running of the family brought social and economic problems of its own.

He said the social consequences had frequently been overlooked in migration and development policies. International remittances to developing countries, amounting to an estimated \$283 billion in 2008, were often the main income of a receiving family and

were usually used for day-to-day expenses, including school fees and materials. However, the long-term absence of a parent could undermine the very objective that led to the migration in the first place; thereby undermining a family's prospects. A second challenge was the brain drain of health-care workers that siphoned away nearly one fourth of the few African doctors available in the poorest parts of the continent.

BELINDA PYKE, Director for Equality Between Men/Women, Action against Discrimination, Civil Society of the European Commission, said, over the past few years, European Union member States had supported a continuous increase in women's participation in the labour market and the equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS, through the provision of care services, flexible working arrangements and leave arrangements. That had been supported by the European Cohesion Funds that co-funded specific and targeted measures of the European Union. In October 2008, the European Commission presented a package of initiatives on reconciliation between work, private and family life in order to improve the European Union's legal framework in terms of leave arrangements and to highlight the importance of further developing care services, notably for young children. Two proposals for revising European Union legislation in family-related leave had been proposed by the European Commission and were now being discussed by the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament.

She said that the 2007-2011 European Programme for Action to Confront HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis through External Action emphasized the need to promote gender equality and address the fact that girls and women had a heavier burden than men and were affected more often and at an earlier age than men by HIV/AIDS. Strategies were based on a broader commitment to support the scaling up towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010. The European Commission was determined to contribute to implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) on women, peace and security. In December 2008, European Union Ministers for Foreign Affairs adopted a new comprehensive approach on the role and obligation of regional actors to protect women in conflict situations and promote their role as peacebuilders.

XENIA VON LILIEN-WALDAU, Liaison and Public Information Officer in the Liaison Office, New York, of the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), said the sharing of responsibilities between women and men was a concern in all sectors of rural and agricultural development. Caring for relatives with HIV/AIDS was a particular concern, as the pandemic had spread rapidly to rural areas over the past 10

years. Many people with HIV/AIDS were returning to their villages for care when suffering increased.

She said that development interventions that focused on strengthening coping mechanisms for the economic empowerment of rural people had been most successful. She highlighted projects supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Belgian Survival Fund in Africa (Zimbabwe, Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya), which combined economic development with opportunities in HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment services. She welcomed the Women Commission's proposed long-term programme, particularly the suggestion that rural women be the focus of the 2012 priority theme. As 2008 brought to the fore the centrality of agriculture, the Commission might consider the link between rural women's empowerment and greater food security. Also, the World Bank *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook* provided an up-to-date understanding of gender issues in agriculture, which the Commission might wish to use as an input to its general work.

JANE HODGES, Director of the Bureau for Gender Equality of the International Labour Organization (ILO), said time-use studies worldwide showed that women were involved in paid work in higher numbers than ever before, but they continued to bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid work in the household. The current global economic crisis would exacerbate women's "double burden". The latest ILO data showed that, by the end of 2009, women's unemployment would be 7.4 per cent compared with 7 per cent for men. Evidence from developed and developing countries alike showed that work-family balances measures must be part of the policy package for achieving decent and productive work for women and men. ILO's Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention No. 156, which had been ratified by 40 countries, called for equal opportunity and treatment for female and male workers with family responsibilities. Ratifying States must adopt national policies to enable people with family responsibilities who were engaged or wished to engage in employment to exercise that right without discrimination, and without conflict between their employment and family responsibilities.

That policy package worked best when part of a wider framework of measures to promote gender equality, she said, highlighting examples of good practices in Kenya, India, Paraguay and New Zealand. She recommended that Governments ensure that women and men had access to parental and other forms of leave, in order to care for children and sick relatives. That should be supported by incentives for men to take leave and share in family caregiving. She called on Governments, international and regional organizations, employers' and workers'

organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to promote ratification and implementation of Convention No. 156; increase public investment in infrastructure and services to alleviate unpaid work demands on households; improve working conditions and the quality of working life, including through the reduction of work hours and more flexible working arrangements; and strengthen social dialogue and coordination between line ministries, employers, trade unions and women's organizations to ensure coherent policies and measures to promote a more equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women.

LISE MARIE DEJEAN (Haiti), endorsing the statements of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 and China, said 3.3 per cent of women and 1.8 per cent of men had been affected or infected by HIV/AIDS. Haiti's response for the last 20 years had been good, due to the partnership between the public and private sectors. Haiti expressed its "unswerving" will for women's rights in January during the official presentation on its implementation of the Women's Convention. Since obtaining civil and political rights in the 1950s, women had been elected to various posts: 10 per cent of women were in Senate, and 21 per cent held ministerial posts.

In establishing structures that guaranteed gender equality, it was important to mobilize the highest echelons of Government, she said. Haiti's policy on equality depended on a change of mindset. The country had adopted measures in the area of education, and was working to delete images and words from school textbooks that promoted stereotypes. Moreover, a committee had been created to develop a gender-sensitive budget. The growing prevalence of HIV/AIDS among women proved that the transmission of the virus was heterosexual. Maternal mortality had increased from 523 for every 100,000 live births in 2003 to 630 per 100,000 in 2006, which was of great concern. To improve the health system, controlling HIV/AIDS was part of the development programme. Haiti had worked with United Nations agencies and established the Haitian coalition on women and AIDS.

MAX-OLIVIER GONNET (France) said, this year, the fight against HIV/AIDS was at the core of France's national priorities. The French Government had earmarked €360 million annually to defeat that scourge. France was the second-largest contributor to the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and a leading contributor to the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Fighting the pandemic must go a step further to include better access to care, including antiretroviral treatments, particularly in Africa. France was committed to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, with the aim of ensuring gender equality and giving women the same rights as men. During its term as President of the European Union, France had proposed the adoption of guidelines for action to end violence against

women. Women today bore the brunt of household tasks and caregiving of family members, including those with HIV/AIDS. In fact, girls often gave up their studies to provide care for others.

He stressed the importance of highlighting the scope of unpaid work done by women in caregiving, noting the cost of doing such work and the social implications for families. He stressed the immediate urgency to develop and extend social protection to caregivers. It was also necessary to ensure that the burden of caregiving was equally shared by men and women. France's policies aimed to reconcile family and work life. The French Government provided assistance to mothers after childbirth and financial support to businesses to help employees reconcile family and work responsibilities. It also provided a wide range of childcare services. During its Presidency of the European Union, France had stressed the importance of providing direct support to implement Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008). In the current crisis, women should not serve as an "adjustment variable". It should be ensured that women had their rightful place in the labour market, with equal pay. That must be done as a matter of justice and as a way to find a lasting solution to the current crisis.

HOUDA MEJRI, Information Officer of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Centre for Gender and Social Development, speaking on behalf of the United Nations regional commissions, said that, in the equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, choices regarding the sharing of paid work and unpaid care were embedded in a "complex constellation" of Government policies, work environments and local care infrastructures. Alliances with a variety of actors enabled a comprehensive approach to creating gender equality. At the national level, innovative alliances between gender equality advocates and economic actors — including employer associations — could sensitize economic actors to gender aspects. The corporate sector was crucial in providing flexible work arrangements for men and women. The Economic Commissions for Europe (ECE) regional meeting in the context of Beijing + 15, set for July, would be a platform for exchanging corporate sector practices.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, she noted that, at a 2007 meeting in Ecuador involving high-level representatives of women's advancement machineries, participants had agreed to promote the inclusion of unpaid work in national accounts, and formulate policies, programmes and economic incentives to guarantee decent paid work for women who had no income of their own. On the equal sharing of responsibilities, in the context of HIV/AIDS, ECA had completed the Treatment Acceleration Programme in various African countries. Regarding Millennium Development Goal 3 (gender equality), the

regional commissions worked to strengthen efforts to mobilize women's potential for economic growth. Examples of that included the Sixth African Development Forum, organized by ECA; time-use surveys used by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) to assess contributions of men and women to community work; and the focus of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on capacity-building, including on mainstreaming gender into national plans and strategies.

SHUWEN HE, a representative of the Asia Pacific Caucus, said the recent report of the AIDS Commission in Asia stated that there were an estimated 75 million who bought sex from about 10 million women. That had made women extremely vulnerable to HIV, and spousal and partners transmission was now rapidly increasing across Asia. Data from Thailand and Myanmar indicated that about 80 to 90 per cent of HIV-infected women were in monogamous relationships. Spousal transmission was fuelled by traditional patriarchal societal attitudes that put women at a disadvantage at home, unable to negotiate in sexual relationships. However, HIV/AIDS responses by Governments were predicated on the assumption that only "high risk" groups, such as men having sex with other men, prostitutes and drug users, should be protected. That had left women victims of transmission by spouses and partners in the margins of public health support.

She said that legal frameworks and societal attitudes rooted in culture, tradition and customary practices discriminated against women and restricted their rights. Creating a climate in which men and women shared caregiving responsibilities could transform the lives of many women for the better. The agreed conclusions currently failed to reflect the need for community-controlled and culturally-appropriate responses to the unequal sharing of responsibility between men and women, and to acknowledge the impact of the global financial crisis on achieving gender equality. She urged States to lift their reservations to the Convention, ensure that caregiving was well positioned in all policy and funding frameworks, undertake national analysis of women's contribution in caregiving and its role in the economy, and institute effective laws and policies to increase women's political participation and funds for women's leadership, among other things.

MAMA KOITE, Africa Women's Caucus, said Government had the duty to ensure that men and women enjoyed their rights equally. The increasing vulnerabilities of women and girls to sex abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and imbalanced access to care were of great concern. Such issues were exacerbated by women's and girls' family care duties, notably in the context of HIV/AIDS, and she called for strengthening institutional frameworks. Governments

must ensure that action was taken to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS. National programmes must be implemented and, in that context, gender issues must be considered. The Abuja Declaration highlighted that 15 per cent of national budgets be devoted to health care.

She said countries were obliged to live up to their promises, including developed countries' commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of their GDP to official development assistance. She called for the development and local production of generic drugs. Other efforts should prioritize programmes aimed at changing gender and power relations among women and men, boys and girls; and support -- and accelerate -- the commitment to the United Nations gender equality architecture, notably in the creation of a new agency for women's advancement. She called for inciting donors and multilateral finance institutions to provide resources in a timely and consistent manner, including for caregiving services.

FACIA HARRIS, a representative of organizations of Ecumenical Women, said the global response to the HIV pandemic demanded bold and creative approaches that recognized the contribution of gender inequity to women's disempowerment. A gender-sensitive response to HIV must improve policies and programmes that allocated flexible and adequate funds and facilities to women and girls. Multisectoral approaches, as well as national and international legal mechanisms, were necessary to ensure the protection of women's human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights. She promoted universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support in the context of HIV/AIDS, including to antiretroviral therapy, taking into account the feminization of the pandemic. It was also essential to institutionalize gender-responsive budgeting.

She encouraged the allocation of budgetary resources to critical social sectors, including health and education, and the creation of innovative national responses that fairly remunerated caregivers. She also urged Governments to scale up access to antiretroviral therapy and overcome trade barriers, including by distributing generic drugs. Profit motives must not override the urgent humanitarian need for readily available, safe and affordable drugs. She called on Governments to implement the commitments made in the Beijing Platform for Action, the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

AZZA KAMEL, Western Asia Caucus, focused on the wide gap between targets set out in international agreements and women's reality on the ground. In that context,

she expressed concern at the deterioration of women's economic conditions; absence of laws protecting women from violence; lack of Government resources for HIV/AIDS; absence of statistics on HIV-infected women in many countries; and the lack of legislation protecting working women's rights.

As such, she urged Governments, especially Arab Governments, to modify national action plans, policies and measures to promote gender equality; repeal discriminatory laws that hindered the equal sharing of responsibility; and ensure that HIV-positive women were treated with dignity. She recommended that a paragraph be added to the Commission's agreed conclusions, which would urge the promotion and adoption of the articles of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) to ensure the protection of women living under armed conflict and occupation.

JAN RACHEL REYES, Human Rights Advocates, urged a broader perspective on the theme of equal sharing so that it included refugees, internally displaced persons and transnational domestic workers. She commended the inclusion of language in the agreed conclusions on protecting the rights of transnational domestic workers and urged the expansion of drafted language to provide all necessary protection to that population.

Moreover, she said the "household" framework should be extended to include refugee camps and camps for internally displaced persons. Some of the world's largest populations of displaced persons resided in sub-Saharan Africa, where there was a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Increased vulnerability to infection could be linked to the frequently-reported sexual exploitation of refugee women by perpetrators from host nations, peacekeepers and humanitarian aid workers. For that reason, Human Rights Advocates suggested that the Commission recognize, reaffirm and implement the Millennium Development Goals and Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement; urge Member States to recognize and ratify the Conventions on migrant workers' rights and on the status of refugees; and hold violators accountable for sex abuse, racism and xenophobia against refugees, internally displaced persons and domestic workers.

ALEXANDRA JACHANOYA DOLEZELOVA, a representative of the European Women's Lobby, said placing caregiving on the political agenda was a matter of urgency. Gender equality must be at the heart of a holistic approach to care. The time had come to revisit and reshuffle the entrenched gender division of roles, norms and practices that had led to the persistent undervaluing of care because it was carried out primarily by women. Care was not a women's issue, but a concern for society as a

whole. The AIDS pandemic was a bleak reminder of that fact. She called for a clear strategic policy framework that included targets and resources for a holistic approach to care, which removed the disproportionate burden from women to ensure equality with men and strengthened democracy. She sought a political commitment at the United Nations at the highest level to affirm that the right to care and to caregiving was a fundamental human right.

She said she expected that the institutional reform process, particularly of the gender equality architecture, would strengthen resources throughout the United Nations to ensure that a meaningful gender-equality framework was driven from the top and brought transformation on the ground. She sought a reconfirmation of the Barcelona Targets on Child Care, agreed by European Union Heads of State during the 2002 summit. She called for scrutinizing the barriers that were preventing those commitments from being met in all countries by 2010, particularly as they related to accessibility, affordability and quality. She also called for clear gender budgetary provisions as part of national financial and economic recovery plans to ensure long-term investment in care.

JANINE DE BOCCARD, International Network of Liberal Women, explained that the network comprised 14 associations from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. Its activities were inspired by the principles of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the same principles upon which the Women's Convention were based.

She called on Governments to allocate budgets and to craft action plans to enable the establishment of prevention programmes, improve access to treatment, and to ensure a more secure antiretroviral drugs supply. She urged that the issue of equal sharing in caregiving be mainstreamed, and that non-governmental organizations be given the visibility and protection they needed to advance the implementation of their countries' commitments. Special attention should be paid to information, statistics and data inputs.

MARCIA CAMPOS PEREIRA, Women International Democratic Federation (WIDF), said that today's "grave conjuncture of an international financial crisis" was aggravating the situation of women day by day with the increasing deprivation of their jobs. Women in the United Kingdom were losing their jobs twice as fast as men. In most countries, women had an unemployment rate that was 1.6 times higher than that of their male counterparts. There were about 870 million people in the world that were dying from hunger, two thirds of them women. Of the 2.8 billion people living under the poverty line, 70 per cent were women. Women's salaries were usually 30 per cent lower

than men's for the same job. Part-time or temporary jobs had increased among women. "Considered as second-class human beings, we are used to reduce the prices of the working force."

She said mechanisms to prevent the loss of jobs and salaries were necessary. Governments in Europe and Latin America were already adopting measures to face the crisis. In Brazil, for instance, public money was being used for irrigation projects, sanitation works, agriculture and the auto industry. According to the Plan for Acceleration of Growth, 30 per cent of job creation must be destined for women. Those measures could be adopted in every country. The United Nations should demand that Member States not allow their workers to bear the onus of the crisis and that jobs and salaries be guaranteed and protected.

KHANYISILE SARAH TSIANE and CHARL DOMINGO spoke on behalf of the Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice, Salesian Missions representing the Salesians of Don Bosco, and VIDES International, which were faith based non-governmental organizations working with people who were infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS. They ran health-care centres and provided medical treatment, home-based care, counselling, referral services and highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART). They also offered literacy programmes, skills training and assistance in establishing micro-businesses. Their prevention strategy was holistic, challenging boys and girls, men and women to deeper self-knowledge and healthy sexuality based on mutual respect.

They said the organizations' centres for persons with HIV/AIDS assisted girls and women who had contracted the disease as a result of abusive relationships, rape or trafficking for sexual exploitation. They also educated men and boys about the consequences of discrimination, sexual exploitation and violence against women and children. Recognizing the inter-generational transmission of the disease, they recommended among other things that special priority be given to infected children in need of antiretroviral therapy; concerted efforts be made to invest in HIV/AIDS education prevention targeting girls and boys; lifelong antiretroviral therapy be made available for all; and AIDS orphans be cared for in all aspects of their development.

LATHA. K, Regional Chief Editor (Asia), International Federation of Women Lawyers, said that, while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had 60 years ago declared that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights", women were still struggling every day to have their most basic rights

protected. Every Government had the responsibility to ensure that women's rights were respected, protected and fulfilled through policies and laws, as well as in practice.

More specifically, she stressed that Governments could reduce the number of human rights violations against women by creating laws that made such violations illegal; adopting policies and programmes to ensure all people had access to their rights; ensuring such policies were properly monitored and enforced; and providing education and relevant awareness-raising programmes. While Governments were primarily responsible for the protection and promotion of women's rights, the United Nations, civil society, employers and families were among those who could bolster implementation of existing laws and programmes. At the same time, Governments must work harder to, among other things, end human trafficking and sexual exploitation; ensure equal opportunity employment; extend support to rural women; eliminate discrimination against women in all health fields; and eliminate all violence against women.

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For information media • not an official record