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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL CONCLUDES ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW, HEARS NEARLY 50 DELEGATES AS GENERAL DEBATE BEGINS

In parallel meetings today, the Economic and Social Council wrapped up its Annual Ministerial Review, spotlighting actions and progress aimed at achieving the global agenda on women's issues, as it also began its general debate, which heard nearly 50 Government delegations outline their efforts to promote higher standards of living, full employment and socio-economic progress — particularly for women and girls — at home and abroad.

On a busy penultimate day of the high-level segment of its 2010 substantive session, the Council's Annual Ministerial Review — which this year featured a record 13 countries making voluntary presentations on actions to mainstream a gender perspective into all sectors and achieve international targets relating to gender equality and women's empowerment — concluded with detailed presentations by ministers, other senior officials and civil society representatives from Portugal, Republic of Korea, Norway, Australia, Congo and Mongolia.

While all the country presentations focused on progress and challenges in ensuring gender equality 15 years after world leaders adopted the landmark Beijing Platform for Action, each featured a unique highlight. Portugal, for example, noted the appointment of a Secretary of State for Equality in its new Government, as well as its willingness to tackle sensitive issues such as sexual and reproductive health rights, and its gender-related development cooperation efforts within the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries. The Republic of Korea spotlighted the role that women had played in transforming it from a "poverty stricken" nation into an active donor of aid to developing countries.

Norway's presenter announced that, for the first time, the Norwegian Cabinet was made up of an equal number of men and women, acknowledging, however, that "we are still not there" in achieving real gender equity, and that no progress could be attained without strong political will and input from a vocal civil society. Australia's report focused on that country's "Development for All" strategy and highlighted its development cooperation with Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea.

As for the other national reports, Congo's presenter noted Government efforts to tackle "invisible but omnipresent" violence against women and girls, while Mongolia's report flagged the key lesson learned — promoting women's rights required integrated actions, strong cooperation and broad consultation among all branches of Government, as well as civil society and international development partners.

Summing up the Annual Ministerial Review, Council President Hamidon Ali (Malaysia) thanked all participating delegations, including the six that had shared their national experiences today, as well as those of Brazil, Netherlands, Guatemala, Republic of Moldova, Namibia, France and the United States, which had made presentations earlier in the week. He said the discussions had been "rich and highly informative", with valuable lessons that could be helpful to all States.

He said it had been heartening to learn that all countries were making progress to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women, in accordance with their own circumstances and within their own means. At the same time, it was clear that much remained to be done, and that integrated and coordinated gender mainstreaming strategies must target both women and, especially, men.

Many of those same issues were raised in the Council's parallel high-level general debate, where ministers and other senior Government officials stressed that women constituted the majority of the world's poor, lacking access to the basic education, health care, financial resources and rights that would otherwise help them out of the vicious poverty trap.

"Women's human rights must be put on a par with all other rights," Council Vice-President Somduth Soborun (Mauritius), declared in opening remarks. While progress had been made since the ground-breaking 1995 Beijing Declaration — which outlined measures to achieve greater equality for women — more must be done to overcome the gender-based discrimination that inhibited women and girls from leading lives of their own choosing.

In the ensuing debate, several speakers emphasized that women disproportionately felt the negative impacts of the global food, climate and finance crises. "As a woman, I can feel in my skin our disproportionate suffering in times of crisis or hardship," said Mozambique's Minister for the Coordination of Environmental Affairs. The role of women in eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development deserved pragmatic and action-oriented attention.

Others pointed out that the Millennium Development Goals could only be achieved by respecting women as rights-holders and key agents of change, empowered to contribute to development. In that context, they hailed the consensus reached yesterday on creating a new United Nations gender entity, with Belgium's delegate, speaking for the European Union, reiterating the regional bloc's commitment to gender equality as a human right, a matter of social justice and a driver of peace.

Still other speakers highlighted the links between gender inequality and poverty, and further, between poverty and violence against women. Kenya's delegate called for a breaking of that cycle, saying that any serious effort to eliminate bias against women must include a change in societal attitudes. Against that backdrop, some speakers described measures to integrate the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action into national policies, and to include a gender perspective in initiatives aimed at realizing the Millennium Goals.

Lead presenters in the Annual Ministerial Review were Elsa Pais, Secretary of State for Gender Equality, and João Gomes Cravinho, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, of Portugal; Paik Hee-Young, Minister for Gender Equality and Family of the Republic of Korea; Ingrid Fiskaa, State Secretary for International Development of Norway; Robert McMullan, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development of Australia; Jeanne-Françoise Leckomba Loumeto-Pombo, Minister for the Promotion and Integration of Women of Congo; and Tugsjargal Gandi, Minister for Social Welfare and Labour of Mongolia.

Also participating in the general debate were ministers, other senior Government officials and representatives from Yemen (on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China), Nepal (on behalf of the Least Developed Countries), Morocco, Pakistan, Brazil, Estonia, Italy, Poland, Namibia, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Iran, Czech Republic, Australia, Latvia, Austria, Israel, Bolivia, Switzerland, Rwanda, Liechtenstein, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Belarus, Honduras, Bahamas, Peru, Lithuania (on behalf of the Community of Democracies), Argentina, Gambia, Uruguay, Ukraine, Ghana, Mexico, Turkey, Ethiopia, Croatia, Cuba, El Salvador, Indonesia and the Republic of Korea.

A representative of the Observer Mission of the Holy See also addressed the meeting.

Also speaking was a representative of the National Right to Life Educational Trust Fund.

The Economic and Social Council will reconvene in parallel sessions at 10 a.m. tomorrow, 2 July, to continue its general debate and hold a high-level policy dialogue with international financial and trade institutions on current developments in the world economy.

Background

The Economic and Social Council met today to begin the general debate of its high-level segment, and in parallel meetings, continue its Annual Ministerial Review, with presentations by Portugal, Republic of Korea, Norway, Australia, Congo and Mongolia.

Annual Ministerial Review — Portugal

Moderating this morning's Review session was Ritva Koukku-Ronde, an Under-Secretary of State from Finland.

ELSA PAIS, Secretary of State for Gender Equality of Portugal, presented the relevant report (document E/2010/59), saying that, some 15 years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, it was time to ensure widespread implementation of that landmark framework. Indeed, broad attainment of the Millennium Goals could not occur unless all globally agreed targets on women's empowerment were met. Portugal also support full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women peace and security.

She went on to highlight the aims of national plans to tackle domestic and other violence against women, a crime in Portugal, as well as trafficking in human beings, and screened a video of relevant awareness-raising campaigns. Laws on political participation by women had been one of the legislative highlights of Portugal's post-dictatorship growth, she said, adding that women could help make a better democracy. Portugal now had five female ministers out of a total of 16. Moreover, the Government had set various quotas to ensure adequate female representation in political posts. She went on to highlight her country's development cooperation efforts in the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries.

JOÃO GOMES CRAVINHO, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Portugal, said there was now a broad international consensus that the well-being and empowerment of women had a major and positive impact on the promotion of development. However, situations in which women's human rights were threatened or violated remained tragically widespread. Moreover, the political, economic and social discrimination they suffered hindered the development possibilities for entire communities and countries. It was, therefore, perfectly clear that, without significant progress in advancing the economic and social empowerment of women and strengthening their rights, it would be very difficult to reduce poverty, eliminate hunger and promote sustainable development.

With all that in mind, he said, the Portuguese Government was strongly committed to the promotion of gender equality, and had been working hard to ensure that proper guidelines were in place for the incorporation of a systematic gender perspective into national development activities, both at home and abroad. The Government was currently reviewing its national Gender Strategy for Development Policy, an exercise that brought together both government and non-government actors.

He said the new gender strategy would, among other things, focus on promoting women's empowerment through access to education and income-generating activities; promoting the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls; raising attention to the impact of climate change on women's lives; and strengthening commitment to combat all forms of gender-based violence. Looking beyond Portugal, he highlighted the Government's development cooperation with Guinea-Bissau, largely in the health sector and with a focus on women's reproductive rights health.

EKATRINA PARRILLA, Executive Director for Public Policies, Presidential Secretariat for Planning and Programming of Guatemala, and the first reviewer, said her Government was pleased that Portugal was targeting gender equality, domestic violence and human trafficking, as well as making efforts to promote socio-economic development, which had led to poverty reduction. Guatemala was keen to hear more about efforts to bolster women's participation in non-political

spheres. She was also interested in more information on actions and programmes to boost efforts to attain the Millennium Goals, in Portugal and other Portuguese-speaking countries.

INGRID FISKAA, State Secretary for International Development of Norway, commended Portugal's significant progress on gender equality, both internally and through development cooperation. At the same time, she requested additional information about the Government's actions to improve women's political representation. She asked if Portugal could provide more information on initiatives to promote women's health and reproductive rights, and efforts to tackle domestic violence.

Ms. PAIS said in response that bodies had been established at the local levels and the councillors in charge of them had been tasked with setting policies in areas such as paternity leave, wage equality and burden-sharing in the home. A website had been created to track those local-level initiatives, with a view not only to improve information exchanges between councillors, but to invite comments from civil society.

Mr. CRAVINHO, for his part, highlighted the work being carried out through the Iberia-American development cooperation, saying that the Portuguese Government contributed to a fund intended to benefit indigenous people in Portuguese-speaking countries, as well as to programmes training gender affairs officials. On its work with Mozambique, he said the Government was helping that country with institutional capacity-building and policy development in areas such as violence against women and human trafficking. Portugal had helped set up a model police station in Maputo that handled domestic violence cases specifically, he said, adding, however, that Portugal needed to strengthen its overall efforts to include men and boys in its gender initiatives, both at home and abroad.

Commenting on the presentation was the representative of Cape Verde.

Annual Ministerial Review — Republic of Korea

PAIK HEE-YOUNG, Minister for Gender Equality and Family of the Republic of Korea, presented her country's report (document E/2010/71), accompanied by Kim Bonghyun, Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

Ms. PAIK said the international community faced "lingering obstacles" in its effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, noting that the majority of children around the world who did not attend school were girls; women were often engaged in insecure or low-paying occupations; and, despite greater parliamentary participation, they were still underrepresented in political decision-making. Over the past three decades, the Republic of Korea's economy had grown rapidly, and on 1 January 2010, it had joined the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), having successfully transformed itself from a poverty-stricken nation into a donor country.

"In explaining such rapid development, it is necessary to understand the significant role of Korean women in the course of socio-economic development," she said. Since the 1960s, the Government had been taking steps to develop the political and economic capacities of women by incorporating them into the overall development process and reflecting their needs and interests in national policy planning. In particular, the sixth Five-Year Economic and Social Development Plan, launched in 1987, laid out concrete policies geared towards promoting the use of women resources, building their capacity, and improving welfare schemes for women. The Seventh Plan mapped out detailed policy directives for women's development, encompassing education, employment, culture, social activity, welfare and international cooperation.

She went on to highlight her country's work in strengthening institutional mechanisms for women's advancement, gender mainstreaming efforts, and increasing women's representation. In order for it to realize its commitment to enhancing the status of women, women must be better represented in all areas, including the political, economic, social and cultural realms. In that context, the Government had amended, among other things, the Political Parties Act, which required parties to nominate women for at least 50 per cent of the seats in general elections and local council polls.

As for the way forward, the Republic of Korea planned not only to continue its efforts, but to help developing countries achieve gender equality and women's empowerment through enhancement of their economic capabilities; increasing their educational and employment opportunities; and helping to establish or strengthen systems for gender equality.

OCTAVIO ERRÁZURIZ (Chile), the first reviewer, applauded the Republic of Korea's transformation into a donor country, and hailed its work in the area of information and communications technology. He requested additional information on efforts to restructure family and gender policies, and was also keen for the delegation to elaborate on efforts to bolster women's employment, especially in the field of science and technology.

HASAN KLEIB (Indonesia) also hailed the Republic of Korea's "inspiring" transformation, and noted that its report presented many interesting examples of efforts to help developing countries. Those examples emphasized the importance of sharing growth through cooperation, "which is the backbone for advancing our common goals", he said, recalling that the Republic of Korea and Indonesia had signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2009 on joint training and programming between their respective ministries dealing with gender.

MÅRTEN GRUNDITZ (Sweden) said his delegation had noted with great interest the establishment of "target systems" or quotas to increase women's participation, adding that his own country was considering similar quotas for the private sector, but faced some public reluctance. Requesting examples of the Republic of Korea's experience in that area, he asked whether it was considering extending its programmes to the private sector. He also asked for more information on what Republic of Korea was doing to include men in its efforts to mainstream gender.

Mr. Kim said in response that the Government would continue to target women's empowerment in developing countries, and to that end, had named seven gender officers in 2009 to take charge of gender mainstreaming and compiling sex-disaggregated data on the country's aid projects. The Government was also targeting women's health and capacity-building to improve the conditions of women in developing countries.

Ms. PAIK, for her part, said the country had participated in OECD initiatives to enhance the position of women in the workplace through programmes in "interrupted career" support, maternity and paternity leave, and workplace equality, among others. The Government was also keen to protect women against all forms of violence, and had enacted laws to protect them against domestic violence and sex trafficking.

As for gender-specific welfare programmes, she said that system had initially focused on groups such as women with disabilities, but had since broadened to cover all women. For example, such programmes now provided assistance in the form of childcare and babysitting services for women who became ill or were forced to leave town on business, among others. She also highlighted the various national funds for women, which supported, for instance, career-seeking college graduates, or women needing help to start businesses.

Annual Ministerial Review – Norway

INGRID FISKAA, State Secretary for International Development of Norway, introduced her country's report (document E/2010/66), announcing that, for the first time ever, the Norwegian Cabinet comprised 50 per cent men and 50 per cent women. Indeed, two out of three party leaders in the Government were women. Despite that political progress, however, "we are still not there", she said. In the labour market, women still earned less than men; there were still disparities in sharing the burden of household duties; stereotypical attitudes remained a challenge; violence against women persisted; and minority women still faced discrimination. Yet, on that point, she said Norway's position was clear: no tradition, religion or culture could ever serve as an excuse for violence against women.

Emphasizing that political will was the key to her country's success, she said the Government had had the political will to ensure social justice, human rights and equal opportunity for all members of society, regardless of their level of development. Indeed, while it was easy to think that Norway's generous welfare policies on gender equality had been made possible by its oil

revenues, that assumption would be incorrect. “How was this possible? It was the result of political struggle by the poor and progressive — not least by women,” she said, emphasizing that Norwegian women had won the right to vote in the early 1900s.

She went on to say that by the 1950s the Government had ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on freedom of association and equal pay for men and women. “The modern Norwegian welfare State is built on women’s participation in the workforce,” she said, noting that greater participation in the labour force meant a larger tax base that could be drawn upon to expand the social security system and provide better public services. Norway had also promoted political empowerment by ensuring gender equity in Parliament, she said, noting that the Saami Parliament was now 46 per cent composed of women. As for economic empowerment, affirmative action and quotas had been needed to secure gender balance in elected positions, and Norway had been the first country in the world to introduce a legal requirement for gender balance within private sector company boards.

She went on to highlight several family policies promoting gender equality, including generous welfare schemes that allowed parents to combine work and childcare. They included an entire year of paid parental leave, with “quota reserves” for fathers; paid leave when a child was sick; and the right to reduce the number of working hours for employees caring for young children. Wrapping up, she stressed that nothing she had reported today would have been possible without the persistent “push and pressure” from Norwegian civil society, especially women’s groups. Cooperation with both trade unions and employer’s organizations had also been vital to the push to reach gender goals, she said.

METTE MOBERG of Norway’s Forum for Women and Development praised the Government’s cooperation with women’s civil society groups, but noted that, while she was pleased that the report highlighted Government actions to prevent violence against women, the brief mention of that aspect masked the depth of the problem, in Norway and elsewhere. The Forum had also hoped for more targeted and comprehensive strategies to address the impact of climate change on women.

TRINE LINSE SUNDNES of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions said the high participation of women in Norway’s labour would not have been possible without the tripartite dialogue between Government, employers and civil society, among other social partners. The development of child day-care facilities, promotion of the “father’s quota” and wage improvements had all resulted from that dialogue. At the same time, the gender pay gap must be comprehensively solved, she said, adding that greater efforts should be made to move women from part-time to full-time employment. The needs of migrant women should also be addressed, she emphasized.

SVEN OPEKARD of the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise said Norway’s labour market was highly segregated and women tended to dominate the public sector. The persistent 15 per cent wage gap was not an example of mistreatment but rather the outcome of a traditional wage gap between the public and private sectors. On the perceived “competence gap”, he said talent was equally distributed between the sexes, and having women in management positions was “simply good business”.

GERT ROSENTHAL (Guatemala), the first reviewer, said Norway’s report demonstrated the importance of a strong State in a position to implement public policies that made women a priority. Norway’s progress had also been speedy because it was invested in an ongoing review of its gender policies and initiatives, he said, adding that the country had shown rapid socio-economic growth for women. Nevertheless, there were challenges, especially in promoting full-time employment for women, he said, asking the Norwegian panel for additional information on its plans “to recover the remaining ground” and its international development cooperation priorities.

PIET DE KLERK (Netherlands) complimented Norway’s “extensive and frank report”, noting that the presentation highlighted the heavy reliance of social change upon political will. Unfortunately, such support could not always be taken for granted, he said, asking what Norway was doing to keep gender equality and women’s empowerment on the agenda. He also requested additional information on Norway’s experience in promoting parental leave among men. Had such programmes led more women to take jobs or move from part-time to full-time work?

Ms. FISKAA responded by reiterating that her country's gender equality initiatives had been driven by a strong and vocal civil society. Indeed, labour and trade unions remained active in pressing the Government to take firm action in the area of employment. The Government was aware that it could not be content with the progress made, and realized that the gender equality debate must continue, especially among younger generations.

On other topics, she said all Government ministries were now charged with carrying out analyses of their respective gender-related activities. The impact of implementing such activities was now supposed to be included in ministries' budget lines. The Government had found that most ministries were able to include gender-related activities in their budgets and successfully to use gender- and sex-disaggregated data to outline their programmes. On family leave, she said employee attitudes on the issue of parental leave for men were now changing, resulting in higher numbers of women entering, or remaining in, the workforce.

The representative of Portugal also participated in the discussion.

Annual Ministerial Review – Australia

Council President Hamidon Ali (Malaysia) moderated the afternoon session of national voluntary presentations.

ROBERT MCMULLAN, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development of Australia, presenting his country's report (document E/2010/63), said his Government had an ambitious approach to international development and had in recent years built a bigger and better aid programme. Australia had pledged to go further in future with the aim of ensuring "development for all". In that context, the Government targeted all groups, especially the disadvantaged, he said, going on to outline some of the tangible actions that his country, working with partner Governments, had achieved in gender equity.

"Gender equity makes sense," he said, emphasizing that when girls had equal access to education, birth rates declined, maternal mortality fell and the health of both women and children improved. When women as well as men had access to economic opportunity, it helped families prosper and helped the country grow. "Women have half the world's talent and we should all use it," he said, adding that Australia had seen that when women came together to exert influence on policy formulation and decision-making, the lives of all citizens improved. Last week, Australia had appointed its first female Prime Minister, he recalled, noting that the Governor General was also a woman, as were the state Premiers of Queensland and New South Wales.

He then turned to an issue about which both developed and developing countries had to admit they had not done enough to address — violence against women, including domestic violence. With that in mind, Australia had provided Papua New Guinea with some \$75 million for activities in support of efforts to reduce domestic violence, he said, citing also a community-level education programme with the Association of Men against Violence, under way in Timor-Leste.

He went on to say that education was the flagship of his country's aid efforts, especially since women and girls represented two thirds of the almost 1 billion people globally who lacked basic literacy skills. Children with disabilities were especially disadvantaged. Another example of Australia's development cooperation was its partnership with Papua New Guinea in promoting faster progress towards basic education, in support of that country's Universal Basic Education Plan. Concluding, he said: "We face a long-term challenge. Despite our achievements and ambition, we still have a long way to go."

SOFIA MESQÍTA BORGES (Timor-Leste), the first reviewer, described the presentation as a testament to Australia's commitment to ensuring broad development for all. The Government of Timor-Leste enjoyed strong relationships with Australia and their joint development programme highlighted the need for national ownership of such initiatives, with balanced participation by both sides. As a small island developing State still recovering from conflict as it struggled to consolidate its administrative institutions, Timor-Leste shared a common need to achieve the Millennium Goals, and appreciated Australia's ongoing support to that end.

ROBERT GUBA AISI (Papua New Guinea) said that Australia's presentation had noted a number of joint programmes that were being carried out within the robust and mutually respectful relationship between the two countries. There was also a steadily growing aspect of people-to-people links between the two nations. He hailed Australia's commitment to the Millennium Declaration's call for strengthening the international partnership for development. He also stressed the need to "zero in" on education and awareness-raising for boys and young men, so as to better sensitize them to gender issues.

JOÃO GOMES CRAVINHO, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Portugal, the final reviewer, said Australia's report noted the links between women, development and security, and he wondered if the Government was considering adopting an action plan on implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). He also asked whether Australia, Portugal and Timor-Leste could do more together to address gender issues in Timor-Leste. What was Australia doing to promote institutional consolidation in fragile States?

Mr. MCMULLEN said in response that, while the Timorese Government made cooperation easy because it had prioritized gender issues, he had to admit that more could be done, especially in helping that country lower its child and maternal mortality rates. Australia was also keen to press ahead with implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women peace and security.

The representative of Israel also participated in the discussion.

Annual Ministerial Review – Congo

JEANNE-FRANÇOISE LECKOMBA LOUMETO-POMBO, Minister for the Promotion and Integration of Women of Congo, delivered her country's report (document E/2010/78), saying that Congo was 52 per cent female and had prioritized gender in its poverty reduction strategy paper. The national gender policy covered the mainstreaming of gender into all sectors; improving women's productivity; enhancing access to social services; strengthening social benefits for women; and boosting women's social status. The Government was also strengthening its efforts to improve girl's access to education and to combat violence against women.

She went on to say that the Government was also working to curb school drop-out rates and to alleviate the burden of education costs on parents by providing free primary school text books. It was also making significant efforts to reduce maternal mortality, which were caused chiefly by induced abortions, post-partum haemorrhages, post-abortion infections and malaria. Congo was also struggling to update its medical equipment, training and facilities. It had increased budget allocations to the health sector in order to bolster the medicine supply system and reduce health-care costs, especially for prenatal care. The Government had taken action to modernize health-care centres and hospitals.

She said women had very low presentation in public life, chiefly because of cultural and traditional attitudes, but also due to low interest among women in participating in advocacy groups. In response, the Government had developed a number of important bills to bolster women's participation in the political sphere. On other issues, she said the Government was targeting the agricultural sector by rehabilitating rudimentary and archaic infrastructure, and establishing support centres to help girls and young women enter the work force.

On violence against women, she said the Government had established a conservatory against domestic violence and hoped to review the Penal Code so it would cover rape, domestic violence and workplace harassment, among other crimes. That review would be accompanied by a campaign to sensitize men to gender issues, she said. Given its enormous financial needs, the country would require between \$6 million and \$16 million to implement all its women-related programmes and projects. Concluding, she said that, while progress had been made in education and women's representation, Congo acknowledged that more work lay ahead, and it was prepared to press ahead in pursuit of the agreed gender targets, working with traditional and new partners to that end.

ZHANG DAN (China), the first reviewer, welcomed the Congolese Government's integration of gender targets into its national development strategy, and its efforts to ensure equal work for equal pay. It attached high importance to improving women's health and was certainly in a better position today to achieve the Millennium Goals. While the country certainly faced challenges, especially in addressing maternal health and the high drop-out rate, China was certain that it could take significant steps to address those issues if the Government remained committed and the international community provided assistance. Among other questions, she asked what actions the Government had taken to offset the impact of the global economic and financial crisis, and what measures it was taking to ensure that women had access to social services.

CÉCILE SPORTIS, Gender Adviser in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France, said it would be impossible to obtain results without addressing serious health concerns, especially HIV/AIDS and ill-equipped medical facilities. What road map did the Government have to improve the situation of women by 2015? How did it plan to provide women with access to adequate and modern medical care? On violence against women, "the common negative heritage of all the world's women", she said men and boys must be included in the effort to combat the practice.

ADU NGAPI, Director-General for Gender of Congo, said in response that the Government was aware that women's needs were different from those of men, and to that end, its poverty reduction strategy targeted microcredit and maternal health, among other issues. Acknowledging that Congo had one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in sub-Saharan Africa, she said its health facilities were not up to par, very few planning services were available. The Government was considering a road map that would include training, education and awareness-raising campaigns on neonatal and postnatal care, in addition to rehabilitating medical centres.

Highlighting Government efforts to equalize wages in the formal employment sector, she said there were, at the same time, serious challenges in taking such actions in the informal sector, where most women worked and social security was non-existent. On violence, she noted, among other things, that the Government was working with the media to eliminate stereotypes in school textbooks and on television. The Government was also working with community leaders to tackle stereotypes and reduce domestic violence. A key obstacle to those efforts was the persistence of traditional attitudes about women, which meant that victims of domestic violence rarely came forward and perpetrators were rarely punished. The Government was working with bilateral partners to help frame its response to gender-based violence, she said.

MARTIN ITOUA, a member of the Economic and Social Council of the European Commission and previously a member of the Congolese Government, said girls and boys had equal rights at school and all levels of Government were involved in promoting education for young people. "Fruitful" interaction between the Government and civil society had led to progress in areas such as violence against women, as well as in raising awareness about gender issues among men and boys. He reiterated that the "dynamic" partnership in Congo's human development campaign would continue to lead to more progress.

Annual Ministerial Review — Mongolia

Tugsjargal Gandi, Minister for Social Welfare and Labour of Mongolia, and Nasan-Ulzii Enkhnasan, Senior Specialist, Division for Strategy and Policy Planning, Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour, presented their country's report (document E/2010/80).

Ms. GANDI stressed the need for a multisectoral approach in achieving gender equality, noting the links between agriculture and rural development, the need for better health systems, disaster risk reduction, better educational opportunities, migration, food security and better mechanisms for strengthening democratic governance. Those links must be taken into account when designing policies and strategies.

Ms. ENKHNASAN elaborated further on the report, saying that Mongolia was a signatory to many United Nations and ILO conventions concerning discrimination against women, and the Government had enacted several laws to ensure gender equality in all sectors. Mongolia also had a comprehensive national development strategy based on attainment of the Millennium Goals, and

Parliament was currently considering a draft law on gender equality.

She said that, to ensure labour rights for women, Mongolia offered career counselling and job matching services, retraining courses, special loans for owners of small and micro-businesses and public works to encourage employment. While the employment rate had risen over time, the economy could not absorb the labour force. However, Mongolia managed to attain a 53 per cent male-to-female ratio among wage employees, thus attaining the Millennium Goals target. But women's participation in the labour force was still nine points lower than that of men; average salaries in the agricultural sector were lower by 15 per cent; jobs with higher salaries were dominated by men; and rural women received less than 20 percent of the end-produce price.

Major socio-economic changes and a pension-reform initiative could have destabilizing effects, and the Government recognized the need for gender-sensitive policies, she said. Ensuring women's participation in politics and decision-making was important for their further empowerment, she said, but the Government's 30 per cent target for women's participation in politics had failed to receive parliamentary endorsement. However, it had tabled a new bill to re-introduce the concept. Meanwhile, women's representation in the Parliament was declining, mainly due to financial pressures associated with Mongolia's first-past-the-post electoral system, and higher participation by women might not be achieved by 2015 without temporary affirmative-action initiatives.

On women's sexual and reproductive lives, she said Mongolia's target of reducing maternal mortality rates had led to a four-fold reduction, beginning in 1990. To overcome geographic remoteness, weak infrastructure and poor access to facilities, Mongolia was making more use of telemedicine and "maternal rest homes". However, there were still large disparities between rural and urban situations, and natural disasters further strained the health-care system. Current thinking centred on improving women's health care before pregnancy, she said.

URANTSOOJ GOMBOSUREN, Vice-President of MonFemNet, a network of women's organizations in Mongolia, spoke on behalf of civil society, sharing observations and thoughts on the draft law. She said the Government's focal point system lacked the financial resources to make policy recommendations, and there was a need to strengthen that capacity. Areas needing attention included the growing wage gap between women and men, which was approaching 20 per cent in agriculture; sexual harassment in the workplace; and low access to credit for women, which was pushing them towards the informal sector. However, she praised the process undertaken to prepare the voluntary report, whereby the governmental and non-governmental sides had striven to reach a common understanding, which was perhaps the most important outcome of the process.

Mr. ERRÁZURIZ (Chile), the first reviewer, noted the remaining differences between women in urban and rural areas and asked for more information on initiatives to overcome them. What was being done to spur women's participation in the labour market? Regarding the proposed gender equality legislation, he asked which main areas were covered by the proposed legislation, and what obstacles had been encountered in developing it. He also requested information on health workers, asking whether there were enough of them to provide the health services needed by women, such as midwives.

NORIIHIRO OKUDA (Japan), the next reviewer, focused on the human-security aspect of gender equality, asking what Mongolia thought the role of donor countries should be in tackling gender issues. Japan's "initiative on gender and development" aimed at mainstreaming gender through its ODA programme, he explained. Noting the importance of collaboration between Governments and civil society, he asked for examples of such collaboration and how the Government intended to strengthen that relationship.

Ms. ENKHASAN, replying to the question on human security, explained that Mongolia ran projects on sustainable primary health care, rehabilitation of boarding schools, and teacher training. The Government was expanding social services in peri-urban and rural areas, to better provide free basic education and basic health services. It was also improving sanitation for citizens living in the project areas. A social welfare law provided a cash allowance during pregnancy and for women to care for their infants. Mongolia was a signatory to ILO conventions on equal treatment and payment, protection of mothers and prohibition of forced labour, while national laws protected women against

domestic violence, she said. Key indicators showed that women were benefiting from skills training, and drawing on employment benefits at a higher rate than men, thereby contributing to the country's efforts to create an enabling environment for women.

An outdated social insurance law had mandated a lower retirement age for women, she said, noting, however, that the draft law on gender equality sought to guarantee gender equality in State and public organizations. The draft legislation also addressed sexual harassment in the workplace — a first for Mongolia. It had been drafted with wide participation by civil society organizations and there were a few difficulties in approving it, due mainly to objections over mandatory quotas for women in Parliament and Government organizations. She admitted to a lack of medical personnel in some remote areas, and asked donor countries to be understanding of Mongolia's need to collect gender-disaggregated data to better evaluate their needs vis-à-vis women's empowerment.

Ms. URANTSOOJ added that the Government was poised to draft a national programme for building sustainable development of civil society organizations, and intended to amend the law governing non-governmental organizations.

Also participating in the discussion were representatives of the World Meteorological Organization.

General Debate

SOMDUTH SOBORUN (Mauritius), Council Vice-President, launched the debate, noting that gender-based discrimination persisted globally, despite increased awareness on gender equality and women's empowerment. While progress had been made since the Beijing Declaration, more must be done to overcome the gender-based discrimination that inhibited women and girls from leading lives of their own choosing. "Women's human rights must be put on a par with all other rights," he declared.

He went on to say that national presentations and panel discussions demonstrated commitment to prioritizing gender equality and women's empowerment in development strategies. There was a need for broad engagement and dialogue in overcoming challenges to the timely realization of the Millennium Development Goals. Furthermore, the role of partnership in various forms and at different levels was key to generating momentum. "I hope that this debate will provide a platform for launching and strengthening partnerships for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment."

ABDULLAH M. ALSAIDI (Yemen), speaking on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, noted that the progress made had been uneven and obstacles remained to the implementation of internationally agreed targets and commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment. Women still constituted the majority of the world's poor, while illiteracy, health and violence against them remained key issues. National mechanisms continued to face constraints in implementing their mandates, including inadequate human and financial resources.

"Progress cannot be made towards achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, without progress in gender equality and the empowerment of women," he said, underlining the need for collective action to eliminate obstacles. He expressed deep concern about the negative impact of the ongoing global crises, which disproportionately affected women. Hailing the future establishment of the new United Nations gender entity, he stressed the importance of ensuring the continuation of all relevant operational activities, field offices and facilities, as well as existing new country programmes.

He went on to emphasize that greater efforts were needed to support developing countries, including through the fulfilment of all commitments on official development assistance (ODA), debt relief, market access, financial and technical support and capacity-building. There was a need to translate commitments into action, and to redouble efforts to accelerate progress, he said, reaffirming the commitment of the Group of 77 and China to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

JAN GRAULS ([Belgium](#)), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that, despite substantial progress in recent decades, “women and girls still constitute the large majority of the world’s poorest, subsisting on less than \$1 a day”. Girls were more likely than boys to suffer poor access to education, while women lacked access to land, financial resources and technologies. Maternal health was the area in which least progress had been made of all the Millennium Development Goals, particularly in fragile States, he said, adding that the picture was made bleaker by the failure adequately to integrate gender equality and women’s rights into development plans. As such, all actors — international organizations, Governments, civil society and the private sector alike — must renew their efforts to place women’s issues at the heart of the development agenda.

Noting that gender equality was a fundamental value for the European Union, he said it had adopted, on 5 March, a women’s charter covering equal economic independence, equality in decision-making and an end to gender-based violence, among other areas. Externally, it had recently adopted its Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Development for the 2010-2015 period, which aimed to speed achievement of the Millennium Goals, especially Goals 3 (gender equality) and 5 (maternal health). The Plan also detailed actions to increase technical capacity for gender mainstreaming, and aimed to make aid more effective by ensuring that gender equality issues were part of the annual and multi-annual planning process with partner countries.

“Achieving the Goals can only be done if we look at women as rights-holders and key agents of change that are empowered to contribute to development,” he stressed, adding that promoting women’s access to full employment and decent work had a positive multiplier effect on the economy. Sharing responsibilities between men and women enhanced everyone’s quality of life and increased women’s opportunities for education, training and political activities. It was also vital to attain universal access to reproductive health and to address the feminization of HIV/AIDS, he said. As for developments at the United Nations, he welcomed yesterday’s breakthrough in negotiations on reforming the Organization’s gender architecture, saying his country would look to the new entity to help countries collect more reliable gender-disaggregated data. In closing, he reiterated Belgium’s strong commitment to gender equality as a human right, a question of social justice and a driver of peace.

GYAN CHANDRA ACHARYA ([Nepal](#)), speaking on behalf of Least Developed Countries and aligning with the Group of 77 and China, pointed out that challenges to achieving the Millennium Goals were highest in vulnerable countries. Women bore the brunt of obstacles such as poverty, and current levels of financing were inadequate to overcome them, he said, calling for sustainable, enhanced and predictable financing.

Least developed countries had no capacity to withstand economic, social and environmental shocks on their own, he continued. They needed policy coherence, harmonized development cooperation and the promotion of sector-wide programmes. Accountability and transparency were also critical to providing effective results on the ground. Recalling the need to consolidate efforts relating to women and girls, he stressed that economic policies should not undercut development policies.

“We still have a long way to go to enhance the representation of women,” he said, calling for the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. To uplift women’s social, economic and legal status, a multifaceted approach to progress, collective commitments and strong international mechanisms was needed. He also stressed the need to ramp up ODA in favour of least developed countries, noting that aid worked as a counter-cyclical strategy. Lastly, he asked the international community to invest more in developing countries by lending strong support to national programmes and efforts.

NOUZHA SKALLI, Minister for Social Development, the Family and Solidarity of [Morocco](#), said the Millennium Goals were closely linked to the struggle for gender equality, and achieving them was especially related to the fight against discrimination and violence. While the global community had made “undeniable” progress in the area of access to education, among others, considerable challenges were linked to the issue of equality. Promoting women’s rights and equality was the principal avenue for building a fairer, more human world, which required new governance designed and implemented with women’s input.

Noting that her country had clearly committed to implementing an agenda of reforms targeted at promoting human rights and equality, she described the fight against discrimination as a “formidable lever” to further social justice and women’s rights. In 2004, Morocco had reformed its Family Code, which today was based on equality and joint responsibility, and the Nationality Code had also been reformed to give women the same right as men to pass their nationality on to their children born of Moroccan fathers.

Morocco had also intensified its fight against discrimination and, since 2002, had implemented a strategy to combat violence against women, she said. Under the “TAMKINE programme” a draft law against partner violence had been initiated and the Penal Code was being revised. As for maternal health, the mortality rate had dropped from 227 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2004, to 132 deaths in 2009 — a 42 per cent decline. Gender-aware budgeting had reached an advanced stage and parity in the management of public affairs, once a major concern, had reached a turning point, she said.

SARDAR MUHAMMAD LATIF KHAN KHOSA, Minister in Charge and Adviser to the Prime Minister on Information Technology of Pakistan, aligning himself with the Group of 77 and China, said his country’s Constitution guaranteed equal rights for all its citizens and ensured full participation by women in all spheres of national life. Pakistan was preparing a national plan to implement the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on the basis of observations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Pakistan had had the honour of electing Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto as the first female Prime Minister in the Muslim world, and today it had South Asia’s first woman Speaker of the National Assembly, he said. The Government had recently adopted legislation to protect women’s rights, including a criminal law, and had moved a bill on protection against harassment in the workplace, in 2009. The Gender Reform Action Plan of the Ministry of Women’s Development also aimed to reform the gender agenda in a coherent manner.

Turning to the just-concluded Development Cooperation Forum, he said its deliberations this year had assumed particular significance owing to the troubled state of the global economy, and the consequent squeeze in resource flows to developing countries was expected to undermine their efforts to realize the Millennium Goals. In that context, Pakistan viewed the Forum as a unique, inclusive platform for countries to voice their concerns and shape the international development cooperation framework. Welcoming the creation of a new United Nations gender entity, he said the consolidation would help gender equality and women’s empowerment.

NILCEA FREIRE, Minister of the Special Secretariat of Policies for Women of Brazil, underscored the advances her country had made in economic and social indicators, notably the reduction in inequality between rich and poor. Poverty had been kept low and, thanks to a strategy to promote social justice, Brazil would be likely to attain all the Millennium Goals by 2015. Services offered through the *bolsa familia* programme included prenatal examinations, nutritional supplements and support for children’s health, she said, noting that the programme had benefited more than 12 million poor families in the country, representing 40 million people.

In terms of education, women were a growing presence in all levels of teaching, she said, adding that more women attended university and held more loans for graduate and doctoral programmes than men. To eliminate inequality between the sexes, the Government had launched a plan in 2005 to combat violence against women, especially black and indigenous women. Brazil had also made progress in advancing progress towards attaining the Millennium Goals and hoped to achieve a 15 per cent reduction in maternal mortality by 2011, she said.

URMAS PAET, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia, said progress towards gender equality had been fragile in the last 15 years. When crises occurred, advances in gender equality and women’s rights were the first to disappear, he said, noting that the current financial crisis had fuelled unemployment, malnutrition and hunger among women. Violence against women had also increased and maternal mortality remained high across much of the developing world. Women were among the most gravely affected by the rising number of environmental disasters, but financing for the mitigation of climate change too rarely took a gender perspective into account.

Still, some progress had been made towards erasing gender inequality, he said, pointing out that several countries had managed to narrow the gender gap in schools. The United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Action to Eliminate Violence against Women had set a successful example by helping to bring together judges from several African countries with a view to raising awareness about what was often an unconscious bias in legal reasoning, he said, adding that participants in that Fund were using the “jurisprudence of equality” in their respective courts after forming an association for that purpose.

He said his country contributed to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in addition to providing bilateral aid in support of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Estonia supported several women’s health projects in Afghanistan and had financed others in Georgia aimed at ending gender-based violence, including a psycho-social rehabilitation centre and capacity-development in the region of Abkhazia. In closing, he said the Government was forming a national action plan to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

MARIA ROSARIA CARFAGNA, Minister for Equal Opportunities of Italy, welcomed the creation of a United Nations gender entity as a “crucial step in promoting women’s rights worldwide”, stressing that each of the Millennium Goals was directly or indirectly linked to women’s rights. Societies in which women could not enjoy the same rights as men would be unable to make adequate progress by 2015, she noted.

Highlighting her country’s initiatives in favour of access to microcredit, she said Italy’s commitments focused on filling existing gaps and widening the scope of social, economic and productive opportunities for women. Progress could be accelerated by extending essential services and strengthening health-care structures to protect women and girls. Female education, she continued, was one of the most powerful means of establishing a supportive environment for protecting the health of mothers and newborns, and it could potentially prevent 700,000 HIV infections year, she said.

The key to achieving Goal 3 was redistributing health-care services and increasing the representation of women in the workplace, she stressed. The Italian Government had taken measures to establish gender equality in the labour market, introducing new laws which imposed severe sanctions on employers who practised discrimination. As for violence against women, she emphasized that physical and mental abuse were great violations of human rights, and even more intolerable when used as an instrument of war. “If we neglect the importance of empowering women and forget the rights of young girls, we risk weakening our countries’ growth because gender equality represents a cost for our national economies,” she said.

JOLANTA FEDAK, Minister of Labour and Social Policy of Poland, said her country worked to implement gender mainstreaming in many ways. It was focusing on improving women’s status, ensuring equal opportunities for women in the labour force, eliminating gender stereotypes, and promoting and generating awareness about gender equality. Within the framework of the initiative competition for non-governmental organizations, her Ministry was co-financing the activities of non-governmental organizations to create equal opportunities for women in socio-economic areas under the “promoting women’s participation in the public life” programme. Promoting women’s participation in decision-making strengthened the public sphere. Fifteen years after the World Conference on Women in Beijing, it was clear that gender equality was necessary for development. The Congresses of Polish Women, organized since Poland’s political transition 20 years ago, showed that the gender equality process could not be stopped.

She said that the Congresses of Polish Women, held in June 2009 and June 2010, had enjoyed the participation of 6,000 Polish women of all stripes. Supported by her Ministry and European Union funds, those Congresses had led to the adoption of measures to foster women’s socio-economic regionally and locally. Efforts to bolster women’s employment and entrepreneurship, help them balance family and professional life, and boost their participation in decision-making had been mainstreamed, but national leaders were concerned over the slow progress in those areas. On average, women accounted for about 20 per cent of parliamentarians, which was not enough for them to influence the

most important State decisions. On average, only 60 per cent of women were active in the labour force. Gender equality must be treated as a long-term investment rather than a short-term liability.

DOREEN SIOKA, Minister for Gender Equality and Child Welfare of Namibia, aligning with the Group of 77 developing countries and China, said quality basic education better equipped girls and boys with the knowledge and skills to take an active role in social, economic and political decision-making as they entered adulthood. Namibia had achieved its goals to eliminate gender disparity in secondary education, which it would most likely achieve in primary and tertiary education as well by 2015. In addition, access to education had improved with the adoption of the "Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learners' Pregnancy" and the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme, which would help meet 2012 targets.

Despite such progress, challenges remained in the implementation of the internationally agreed goals on gender equality and women's empowerment, she said, underscoring that women were still most likely to be unemployed or working in the informal sector, and ranked among the least paid. They did not have access to credit and were most likely to be affected by HIV.

Moreover, there were few women in top positions in the public and private sectors. Recognizing that gender inequality impeded the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, she reaffirmed Namibia's pledge to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome of the General Assembly's twenty-third special session and other internationally agreed goals on gender equality and women's empowerment.

ALCINDA DE ABREU, Minister for Coordination of Environmental Action of Mozambique, aligning with the Group of 77 and the least developed countries, commended the Secretary-General's report and agreed with its analysis of impacts of the global challenges to women and gender relations. "As a woman, I can feel in my skin our disproportional suffering in times of crisis or hardship," she said. It was her strong belief that women's role in eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development deserved pragmatic and action-oriented attention. Concerted efforts at regional and global levels also were needed to complement national actions to meet those and other challenges, which hampered attainment of the Goals.

She said that Mozambique, for its part, had undertaken "tremendous" efforts to raise women's status in the public and private sectors and to overcome gender inequalities in Government, Parliament, municipalities and communities. From those efforts, 39.2 per cent of Parliament was now comprised of women, and a woman had served as Prime Minister from 2004 to 2010. Mozambique had also seen success in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. It had created national machinery for women's empowerment and gender equality, developed related policies and reviewed discriminatory national legislation. Results of the girl-child education programme also had been "enthusiastic". Maternal and child mortality had been reduced, as had poverty. Despite that, more must be done in the areas of women's health and education. In closing, she urged the Council to better respond to emerging challenges for the success of women's participation in eradicating poverty, adapting to and mitigating climate change and promoting sustainable development.

ALEXANDER YAKOVENKO, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, noted that global financial and economic crises further complicated the achievement of gender equality and stressed the need for specific measures to protect women's rights, adding that his country shared the Secretary-General's view that all Member States should develop national strategies and support his campaigns towards that end.

Mindful of the need to reform the United Nations gender architecture and create a new composite entity, he said, the Russian Federation believed it should be based on the principle of geographical universality and have a mandate covering all countries in order to be effective. Emphasizing that gender equality was a key element for achieving sustainable development and comprehensive human capacity-building, he said the Government had implemented several domestic policies to help women become an active part of society, the work force and the Government.

The Government paid special attention to the elimination of violence against women,

including violence in the family, he said, adding that the necessary political, legislative and practical measures were in place. Furthermore, several bodies had been established to monitor violence, including women's non-governmental organizations and networks of NGO crisis centres. Gender equality meant the creation of conditions for women to enjoy their rights, he said, underscoring the need for joint efforts on the part of Member States.

OL'GA ALGAYEROVÁ, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, said there were still gender imbalances in decision-making, leading to gender segregation in education and the labour market. Policymakers put forward distorted perceptions of policy objectives, which were often insensitive to gender and culture. Slovakia faced many such challenges, and despite successes achieved in the area of gender equality and equal opportunities, gender stereotypes still persisted. Indeed, support for gender equality would be much more effective if formal legislative and strategic documents were accompanied by specific activities to incorporate a gender perspective into daily life, she said. For that reason, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family organized an annual competition that took into consideration the family responsibilities of employees and the gender aspects of working conditions.

Turning to actions at the international level, she cited the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, which was aimed at addressing gender equality. She called on Member States to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court and give maximum support to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. She expressed her country's firm support for a United Nations gender entity, and stressed that resources must be found to promote the Millennium Goal on gender equality and women's empowerment, saying it would be an investment in peace and sustainable development.

HOSSEIN FARAHI, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iran, said his country's Constitution provided the basis for the empowerment of women, with a view to their meaningful participation in socio-economic, cultural and scientific activities, while guaranteeing the equality of men and women. In the 30 years since Iran's Islamic Revolution, Parliament had worked steadily to enact a range of laws in support of women and family issues, he said.

He said his country had undertaken several measures for the achievement of the Millennium Goals, which had led to growth in education and literacy, full medical coverage for families and declining mortality rates, among other things. In addition, Iran had implemented policies to generate the employment and empowerment of women, and to strengthen women's cooperatives, especially in rural areas.

Poverty, a "persistent and increasing burden on women", was a critical issue of concern, he said. Striving to uproot it and promote social justice, the Government had adopted specific mechanisms and measures, focusing on expanding the insurance system and women's social services. More women now enjoyed economic and political participation, he said, noting that 736 non-governmental organizations were currently active in women's issues, 12 times more than a decade ago. Among other important achievements were the increasing participation of women in the areas of publishing, arts, film production, sports and scientific Olympiads in recent years.

HYNEK KMONÍČEK, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic reaffirmed his country's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, saying that, in spite of the global economic crisis, their achievement was a long-term priority of Czech development cooperation, and the most important guideline for defining the Government's development strategy.

In addition, he said, the Government had recently confirmed its determination to abide by the principles codified in the new Act on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, and also in the new National Concept of Development Cooperation for 2010–2017. The concept determined, among its priorities, relevant sectors like environment, agriculture, social and economic development, and support for democracy, human rights and social transformation. Successful achievement of the Millennium Development Goals would not be possible without effective partnership and national ownership.

He underlined the importance of further action to identify and address gender stereotypes and all forms of discrimination against women and girls, particularly on the occasion of the meeting

of the Economic and Social Council, which stressed gender equality and women's empowerment as a cross-cutting topic of its debate for the current session. With only five years until the 2015 target year for attaining the Millennium Development Goals, the High-Level Summit planned for September would be an important opportunity to boost progress towards the Goals, and to reach consensus on the means for their timely attainment.

ROBERT MCMULLAN, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance of Australia, affirmed his country's strong commitment to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, stressing that collective efforts must be underpinned by robust institutional mechanisms. National human rights institutions had an important role to play, he said, given that they held Governments accountable and worked with them to achieve gender targets. In that regard, Australia supported greater participation and the independent status of such institutions in the Commission on the Status of Women.

He stressed that education was a key component of progress, noting that it could create opportunities for children to escape the cycle of poverty. It could positively affect many areas of life, including employability, wages, reproductive health and involvement in decision-making. Australia had substantially increased its funding for education through an overseas development assistance programme to \$744 million this year. In the area of health, it was working to promote access to reproductive health services, and cooperating with partner countries to improve the performance, affordability and accessibility of health systems for women and girls. Eliminating violence against women was critical to closing the gender gap and producing better development outcomes, and Australia was developing a national plan and contributing to global efforts to reduce such violence. But there was a lack of knowledge about tackling such issues, and more should be done to change that. State leaders should prioritize and resource implementation of the Millennium Goals.

ATANAS MANYALA KEYA, Assistant Minister for Gender, Children and Social Development of Kenya, aligning with the Group of 77, said that the goal of economic and social development was to improve the quality of lives, especially for women and children. Gender equality was an irreducible condition for inclusive, democratic and violence-free development. In that context, he was pleased that Kenya was recovering from the recent shocks to its economy. Noting that the Secretary-General's reports had shown the linkages between gender inequality and poverty, and between poverty and violence against women, he urged breaking that vicious cycle. Any serious effort to eliminate bias against women must include a change in societal attitudes.

He said that Kenya's review of its Constitution had allowed for entrenching gender equality into basic law and fostered more equitable participation for women as full members in all levels of national governance. The referendum to decide on the Constitution should be held in early August and, once adopted, the text would highly enhance benefits for women. In other areas, Kenya abhorred violence against women and supported all initiatives to combat it, including the "UNiTE to End Violence against Women" campaign. Women in rural areas faced unique challenges and gender-responsive policies to promote their economic empowerment, including through more access to markets, were needed.

Turning to trafficking in persons, which had defied Kenya's efforts to eradicate it, he said he supported General Assembly efforts to put in place a global plan of action to deal with the problem. In his Government's support of such work, he said "we must demonstrate political good will", noting that, with so many competing priorities, gender-specific programmes risked being put on a waiting list. Women's entrepreneurial development should be fostered and their access to technology promoted. Stressing the importance of entrenching gender sensitivity into the United Nations response to natural disasters, he also raised alarms that the Goals related to maternal health and child mortality risked not being achieved. At the upcoming high-level meeting to review the Millennium Development Goals, he urged looking anew at strategies to support countries like Kenya that were on the threshold of making significant gains to meet the targets.

SOLVEIGA SILKALNA, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Latvia, aligning with the European Union, welcomed the recent consensus to create a unified United Nations gender entity, which would strengthen the position of gender-equality issues on the Organization's agenda. Noting that 2010 would mark the last chance to launch a truly concerted effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, she said the upcoming high-level meeting on the Goals should focus on

progress and shortfalls. Every State, including her own, could make more progress to achieve them. In many respects, Latvia was a positive example of gender equality and women's empowerment, with women constituting, for example, 71 per cent of university graduates, 50 per cent of Supreme Court judges and 45 per cent of employees in research and development.

At the same time, challenges facing women had to be tackled, she said, notably the risk of poverty, which was especially important for vulnerable groups such as pensioners, the disabled and single-parent families. As Latvia began on the road to economic recovery, the poverty risk would gradually fall, especially as employment started to improve. In recent years, Latvia had shared experience with countries including Afghanistan, Iraq and Georgia, encouraging women to become more economically and politically empowered. Gender equality had been integral to her country's development cooperation, and it would continue evolving its development cooperation policy platform for 2011-2015, now in preparation.

IRENE FREUDENSCHUSS-REICHL, Director-General for Development Cooperation, Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs of Austria, associating herself with the statement by the European Union, said the world would not achieve the Millennium Development Goals without full participation of women and girls in the development process. Even in countries where the targets were on track, the most vulnerable populations "stay aside"; for that reason, States must focus urgently on them. Austria was especially concerned about the feminization of HIV/AIDS, which had to do with discrimination, social restrictions and insufficient access to sexual and reproductive health services. It would soon host the eighteenth international AIDS conference in mid-July in Vienna, under the topic "Rights here, right now", to highlight the connection between women's rights and that pandemic.

She said that a related priority for Austria was women's role in building peace. Women were victims of armed conflict, but they were also important actors in its prevention. The Security Council had passed several resolutions aimed at strengthening their role in peacebuilding and peacemaking, and Austria was committed to making this year's commemoration of the tenth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000) a success. Austria also welcomed the establishment of the new United Nations gender entity and looked forward to the swift appointment of an Under-Secretary-General to provide strong leadership in the crucial start-up phase.

MAZAL RENFORD, MASHAV — Agency for International Development Cooperation, Israel, said her country continued to examine new ideas as it implemented policies designed to facilitate women's advancement, gender equality, growth and development. Within the framework of its international cooperation programme, Israel conducted training activities for women's empowerment both in Israel and the developing world. It was currently cooperating with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe on a project that fostered entrepreneurship for women from Central Asia and the Caucasus regions. In Latin America and the Caribbean, Israel was in a partnership with the Young Americas Business Trust serving 22,000 beneficiaries in 29 countries, including indigenous women.

She added that Israel was currently exploring a partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in its teacher training initiative for sub-Saharan Africa. In 2011, it planned to hold a biennial women's leaders conference, also in cooperation with UNESCO, on women, education, training, science and technology. There, it would highlight the need to encourage girls in secondary school to pursue scientific and technological training. Along with economic training, education and poverty reduction, another element essential to sustainable development was health. The devastation caused by HIV/AIDS and its disproportionate effect on women was an example of the impact of poor health on development. Her Agency was teaming up with UNAIDS to offer training on addressing HIV/AIDS-related needs specific to women and girls, and through it, was hoping to reduce maternal mortality and the spread of that disease.

VARINIA DAZA, Adviser to the Minister for Development and Planning of Bolivia, said her country wished to build a comprehensive State that would have a strong relationship with civil society. Its new political Constitution reflected efforts towards that end, and guaranteed the rights of women and girls. The Government recognized gender equality and the empowerment of women as integral to the broader promotion of human rights, she said, noting that its national development plan defined parameters for building more inclusive relationships with women, and focused on social policies as well as rural indigenous women.

Women had become active participators in Government, holding 49 per cent of the seats in the Popular Assembly and 50 per cent of the positions in the Cabinet. Highlighting the importance of income redistribution in reducing extreme poverty, she said Bolivia strove to provide women with land titles, and promoted transfer programmes aimed at school-aged children, senior citizens and pregnant women. Additionally, Bolivia had succeeded in closing the gender gap and had declared itself a “territory free of illiteracy”, she said. Progress made towards that end was a way to ratify her country’s national commitment to guaranteeing gender equality and women’s empowerment through the use of a development model based on broad participation. Welcoming the new United Nations entity for women, she said she was sure it would carry out comprehensive actions to ensure women’s participation.

OLIVIER CHAVE, Head of the Division Global Institutions, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, noted with satisfaction the growing number of women who had become active in legislative, executive and judicial bodies. At present, 19 per cent of all the world’s parliamentarians were women, compared with the year 2000, when that figure had stood at only 14 per cent. In the private sector, however, the presence of women on company boards and in upper management had shown fewer advances, while progress in different parts of the world was uneven and fragile, he said, adding that gender equality and women’s rights were especially threatened by the financial, economic, environmental and energy crises. Women were often the most vulnerable to external shocks and the first to be affected by increases in unemployment and by poverty, particularly in developing countries. For that reason, Member States’ commitment to advancing the cause of women was “a must”.

He said there was a glaring difference between rich and poor countries with regard to one indicator in particular — maternal health. A large number of deaths directly linked to maternity occurred in developing countries, in addition to which there was an alarming upsurge of violence against women, and more restrictions on access to health care and education for women and girls than for men and boys. A large majority of school-leavers were girls. To address those challenges, States needed a rights-based approach that would strengthen women’s capabilities and sense of autonomy. They must ensure that women had access to public services and economic resources, and that they were able to participate fully in political life and society as a whole. To make women more visible, Switzerland was striving to give greater recognition to the “care economy”, which was frequently ignored because there were no macroeconomic indicators to measure it.

KAMPETA SAYINZOGA, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning of Rwanda, aligning herself with the Group of 77 and China, welcomed the creation of a new United Nations gender entity, but noted with concern the impacts of ongoing food, climate and financial crises on gender equality, women’s empowerment and achievement of the Millennium Goals. There had been uneven progress, notably vis-à-vis gender equality, maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS, she said, urging a strengthening of women’s participation in decision-making.

The role of rural women was key to improving agriculture and food security, as well as eradicating poverty, she said, adding that a gender perspective must be mainstreamed into all political, social and economic policies. Developing gender-sensitive policies to promote women’s economic empowerment and protect their access to land and inheritance rights, among other things, was also important. Countries should strive to systematize the collection of data disaggregated by sex, age and disability, she said.

JEANNE E. HEAD, National Right to Life Educational Trust Fund, said the loss of mothers and babies due to a lack of basic health care and the failure to dedicate adequate resources to resolve that issue was the greatest impediment to development in all areas. It was vital to achieve the Millennium Goals on child health and maternal health, she stressed, warning that until the latter target was realized, none of the others would succeed. Expressing grave concern over dangerous claims that legalized abortion was the way to reduce maternal mortality in the developing world, she said the danger lay in the lack of modern medicine and quality health care, while legalized abortions only led to more abortions. It was, therefore, essential to reduce maternal mortality rates from all causes by improving maternal health care, she said, adding that women in many parts of the world also needed clean water and better nutrition.

CHRISTIAN WENAWESER ([Liechtenstein](#)) welcomed United Nations efforts, campaigns and initiatives to eliminate violence against women and girls, and its devastating social, economic and humanitarian consequences. “States have an obligation to protect women and girls from all forms of violence, hold perpetrators accountable and provide justice and remedies to the victims,” he said, stressing that impunity sent a message that violence was inevitable and acceptable. National and international legal norms, standards and policies must be fully implemented globally, he emphasized.

Nearly 10 years after the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), the participation of women in conflict resolution — particularly in formal peace processes — remained a distant goal, he said. Furthermore, there was an alarming increase in sexual violence in various conflict and post-conflict settings, he said, calling on Member States to intensify their efforts to implement fully and effectively all relevant mandates on women, peace and security. That would strengthen the role of women as stakeholders, and have a catalytic effect on the empowerment of women affected by armed conflict, he said.

The education-related Millennium Goals had not yet been met, he continued, pointing out that several challenges continued to prevent women and girls from exercising their rights. Underlining the negative effects that unequal family responsibilities had on women in the workforce, he called on Member States to develop and strengthen policies, strategies and programmes to enhance the employability of women. Promoting education for women and girls would strengthen their personal autonomy and improve their social and economic status, he said.

LI BAODONG ([China](#)), noting that traditional gender stereotyping was deep-rooted, said more improvement was needed with regard to women’s economic situation, social participation and political status. He hailed the Council’s “fruitful efforts” to implement the Millennium Goals, and expressed his Government’s support for the role of the United Nations in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment. Given that China was home to one fifth of the world’s women, with 641 million living there, the Government had implemented a series of policies aimed at ensuring growth, safeguarding livelihoods and maintaining stability.

Highlighting some of those policies, he said one of them gave women access to microcredit with fully subsidized interest, and helped them use the funds to increase their income and wealth. The Government had also worked steadily to increase health-care resources for women and children, gradually improve the national health care network and carry out a free health survey among rural women. Even in light of the progress made, he stressed that China was still a developing country which housed the greatest number of people living in poverty. In that regard, safeguarding the survival and development of women was a long-term task, he said.

BASO SANGQU ([South Africa](#)), aligning himself with the Group of 77 and China, said 2010 was significant for the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment, as it marked the 15-year implementation review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. South Africa was encouraged by developments around the global governance architecture on gender, he said, adding that the merger of several United Nations entities into a single body clearly showed the importance accorded to gender issues and the promotion of women’s quality of life. South Africa considered those issues to be at the core of the Goals, from improving health and reducing hunger to expanding education and lowering child mortality.

Strongly condemning all forms of violence against women and girls, he said the new entity should champion women’s needs and concerns, and further mainstream gender into the Organization’s work, particularly its country programmes. Of notable concern was the continued absence of women from formal peace processes, he said, noting that their needs were overlooked in peace agreements, at donor conferences and in post-conflict legal reforms. The tenth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) provided an opportunity to examine progress on that score.

He went on to say that his country’s national gender machinery included the Ministry of Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities, which was currently implementing a gender-responsive budget provided by the Treasury. As for efforts to bridge the gap between political intention and action, he said the African Union had set the goal of achieving gender parity in

decision-making by 2020, while the Southern African Development Community (SADC) target called for 50 per cent women in decision-making in all sectors by 2015.

KHALID ABDALRAZAQ AL-NAFISEE ([Saudi Arabia](#)), associating himself the Group of 77, noted the importance of cooperation in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Saudi Arabia would continue to advance development in developing and least developed countries, with a view to eradicating extreme poverty. Citing the importance of combating poverty and providing financial assistance for infrastructure, he said Saudi Arabia was among the first to have contributed to the achievement of the Goals, thanks, in part, to increased public spending by more than one half for education, health services and social development.

He said that efforts to enhance women's participation in economic and social spheres were among Saudi Arabia's strategic plans, with Government policies directly addressing ways to expand women's participation in economic activities. By way of example, he said the Council of Ministers had adopted procedures for that purpose, with a view to making a "quantum leap" in women's participation patterns. A major donor, Saudi Arabia considered foreign aid essential to its foreign policy. As the success of the development process depended on international respect for the cultural privacy and special customs of developing countries, he recalled the need to adopt processes appropriate for such privacy.

Finally, he said reform of international financial, monetary and trade systems required more transparency in related transactions, and building a global economic system that was based on a new partnership between developing and developed countries. That partnership should feature economic relations premised on justice, mutual benefits and shared responsibility.

PETER WITTIG ([Germany](#)), aligning with the statement made on behalf of the European Union, stressed that "a society where women's rights are not respected is a society prone to instability and insecurity". Both the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration provided a framework for Germany's efforts towards gender equality and women's empowerment, he said, highlighting some of his Governments achievements.

Furthermore, he noted that Germany viewed women as agents of change and recognized the need to include them in the work force and in political decision-making processes. "Violence against women must be fought at all levels," he said, underscoring the vital role played by civil society organizations — especially women's organizations — in enhancing women's rights, empowering women and achieving gender equality. Highlighting Germany's support of wide-ranging projects in Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Latin America, he affirmed his country's backing for the new gender entity.

ANDREI DAPKIUNAS ([Belarus](#)) attributed progress made in his country to social policy and a high level of Government spending on education and health. Women now had access to all levels of education, and 55 per cent of the country's women were taking advantage of that. Belarus was one of the 27 countries worldwide with high levels of achievement with regard to the Millennium Development Goals.

He said his Government worked to encourage women's self-employment and entrepreneurship, as well as to reduce the proportion of unemployed women. In addition, new legislation provided for up to three years of parental leave for all members of the family. Belarus was committed to doing everything possible at the national and international levels to achieve gender equality and the women's empowerment, and underscored the need to eliminate gender stereotypes while allowing for women's participation in decision-making processes. Recognizing the link between such inclusion and the positive results of policies, he stressed that the representation of women in senior posts would help efforts going forward.

MARY E. FLORES ([Honduras](#)) said she had heard calls for the Council's session to produce tangible results, and believed that the proposal for a brief, action-oriented ministerial declaration was appropriate. Her delegation had listened clearly to the presentations and had heard about excellent initiations. Some had not borne fruit, which made it important to consider the

different cultural, religious and other aspects of countries in the design of programmes.

In Honduras, she said, women played an important role as agents of change and potential economic resources. Legislation protected women of ethnic groups, while public offices and institutions ensured their rights in the development process. In addition, there were numerous programmes, projects, forms of financing, strategies and infrastructure to reduce poverty. Even with all that, the effects of the global crisis had spread to developing countries, reducing the benefits those nations had gained from development cooperation. The future of the poverty agenda hinged on achieving goals through national development policies.

Moreover, there had been fragmented assistance, she said, and the proliferation of donors did not translate into more assistance. Rather, programmes had been decreased and ODA targets missed. People were more vulnerable to natural disasters that destroyed crops and, in some cases, small island States. The challenge lay in determining how societies could reach out beyond purely commercial interests to show humanism and solidarity. When the benefits of globalization reached the “chapped hands” of those living in the mountains of Honduras, then the world could sleep calmly.

PAULETTE BETHEL (Bahamas), aligning with the Group of 77 developing countries and China, said an unequivocal acknowledgement of women’s central role in economic, social and cultural development must be the point of departure from which assessments, strategies and commitments to gender equality were undertaken. “The message that gender equality is itself a development strategy is not always heard and so it must be said more clearly,” she stressed. Even a modest investment in girls’ education brought huge returns, improving health, nutrition and economic growth, and the Bahamas was committed to the goal of providing universal primary and secondary education.

She said that gender equality and women’s empowerment must infuse all spheres of human activity. At the global level, the lack of access by women and girls to appropriate affordable health care was a concern, and challenges like the disproportionate effect of HIV/AIDS must be faced head on. The Caribbean had been deeply affected by that pandemic, and the Bahamas was implementing intensive awareness-raising campaigns. Apart from health concerns, women still lacked economic opportunities, with many in the informal economy subjected to hazardous work conditions. The Bahamas had reviewed and amended its labour and inheritance legislation to ensure equal access to and treatment in the work force.

In other areas, she said gender stereotyping, forced marriages and trafficking in women and girls constituted serious rights violations. “We cannot afford to relax in confronting root causes — mindsets, cultural and even structural,” she stressed, citing pervasive inequalities in the global economic system. The uneven impacts of globalization could distort development strategies and, thus, the creation of an enabling environment was needed. Ensuring a level playing field would go a long way to helping developing countries achieve the kind of economic prosperity needed to put in place more equal measures for women.

GONZALO GUTIÉRREZ (Peru) said the economic and food crises posed a serious additional burden for women, particularly for those in rural areas. Peru’s national anti-crisis plan provided ad hoc measures to address challenges caused by the crises, and had resulted in much progress. His country had been able to reduce poverty levels over the past seven years, and had seen over a 10 per cent reduction in extreme poverty during that period. Indeed, Peru was on track to reduce the number of people living in poverty by one half by 2015.

He said Peru was committed to promoting gender mainstreaming. That political determination was reflected in several of its programmes. Recognizing the importance of education in the development of human potential, he noted that his country had nearly achieved universal access to primary education by reducing gender gaps and illiteracy rates. However, inequalities persisted in rural areas, owing to gender stereotyping, among other practices. To combat gender discrimination in schools, Peru was working to encourage girls to remain in school and to develop an inclusive citizenship that rejected all forms of discrimination.

He highlighted the establishment of national policies to promote the broad adoption of

equitable values, practices and attitudes. Limited progress had been made in reducing violence against women, he said, noting that his country considered the issue a national priority and was developing measures to publicize laws and actions against it. Achievement of gender equality required effective public expenditure, and he underlined the importance of international cooperation and the exchange of experiences in progressing towards better societies.

DALIUS ČEKUOLIS (Lithuania), speaking on behalf of the Convening Group of the Community of Democracies, said that women's empowerment and full, unhindered participation at all levels of economic, political and social life were key to poverty reduction, economic recovery and prosperity, and the full enjoyment of human rights. Further, such principles were essential to building vibrant and durable democracies around the world, he stressed.

He said that as women and girls were often among the first victims of various conflicts and challenges, their equal participation in decision-making in response to such crises was vital. "The Community of Democracies appreciates the creative potential and valuable contribution made by women in tackling global and regional crises and challenges, both old and new," he said. Such crises were no pretext, however, for relaxing efforts to combat discrimination against women. He underscored the importance of tackling gender stereotypes, restrictive interpretations of women's roles and negative portrayals of women and girls.

Bearing in mind that gender equality was a central element of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, he expressed concern about the uneven progress on Goals 3 and 5, and urged national Governments to promote and ensure gender equality and the full participation of women by adopting relevant legislative and administrative measures. "Good laws on gender equality alone are not enough," he stressed, calling on Governments to ensure the full and systematic implementation of the existing relevant legislation.

JORGE ARGÜELLO (Argentina) said that only a life free of violence against women would allow attainment of the Goals, adding that the prevention and eradication of all such violence was a sine qua non condition for the full effect of women's human rights. In that context, Argentina adhered to the Secretary-General's "UNiTE to End Violence against Women" campaign.

Describing the national experience, he recalled that the crisis that had hit his country in 2001 had translated into poverty levels never seen before. Since 2003, however, the Government had developed economic public reactivation policies and a strong State presence to recover productive capacities. In that framework, having exceeded the Millennium Goal on gender equality, Argentina aimed to achieve higher gender equality in 2015, notably through better economic participation by women and a reduction in the salary gap.

Notwithstanding the superior numbers of women in tertiary and university environments, their better credentials had not translated into better jobs, he said. There was a salary gap, and while the presence of women in hierarchical posts was low in the public and private spheres, Argentina had a nearly 39 per cent female presence in the Chamber of Deputies and 36 per cent in the Senate Chamber. As for maternal health, Argentina had committed to reducing by 10 per cent inequality among the provinces, and had set out to achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health. The challenge was to guarantee sexual and reproductive rights, and to that end, Argentina had worked to implement a programme of sexual health and responsible procreation, among other initiatives.

SUSAN WAFFA-OGOO (Gambia) cautioned against allowing the global food, finance and climate crises to distract from implementation commitments, stressing that letting the guard down now would mean reversing modest achievements in the 12 critical areas of concern identified in Beijing. For its part, Gambia was committed to attaining the goals laid out in the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. In that quest, the country was formulating a gender and women's policy for the decade 2010-2020.

As a major part of the labour force, especially in agriculture, women's participation in formal and informal sectors was steadily improving, she said. In education, Gambia had achieved gender parity at the basic level in 2005, and was on track to achieve a similar result in the lower basic,

upper basic and senior secondary levels. As for health, reducing maternal and child mortality and morbidity were priorities.

To create the legislative framework for the promotion and protection of women's rights, Gambia had enacted the Children's Act of 2008 and the Trafficking in Persons Act of 2007, she said. Many developing countries like Gambia had established blueprints for implementing internationally agreed development targets and were working to meet them. In that work, critical lessons had been learned about the central role of gender equality. "Developing countries cannot do it alone," she said, stressing the importance of donors fulfilling their ODA pledges.

JOSÉ LUIS CANCELA (Uruguay) issued an urgent call for renewed collective commitments to development, noting that the multiple global crises had highlighted the vulnerability and urgency of certain challenges. However, the current economic situation was closely linked to old structural problems, including obstacles to market access and changes in the energy markets. Those issues must to be kept under constant review in order to provide countries with effective tools with which to address them, he said.

The Ministerial Declaration presented both a challenge and an opportunity to consider challenges to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women, he said. The only way to improve women's quality of life was to give practical effect to international commitments, he said, noting that equality and women's full participation must be fundamental elements of economic and social development. Uruguay had taken several measures in that regard, working with the National Women's Institute to promote cross-cutting policies, approving legislation on political quotas, and increasing the visibility and presence of women's policies.

He said that, in its efforts to combat domestic violence, the Government of Uruguay had taken strong measures in its first national plan in 2004, and would continue to strengthen programmes for the early prevention, protection and rehabilitation of victims. He highlighted his country's submission of a draft resolution on smoking and maternal and child health, noting that the issue was of great sensitivity for developing countries. Urging delegations' support in approving the draft text, he called for increased international cooperation in support of the efforts made by developing countries, including middle-income countries.

YURI SERGEYEV (Ukraine), aligning himself with the European Union, said the Secretary-General's recommendations could be instrumental for progress in empowering women. Ukraine had made considerable progress in implementing the outcome documents of the Beijing Conference and the General Assembly's twenty-third special session, and the country's most important achievement was precise coordination of all Government agencies and civil society organizations.

Among this year's priorities was averting a reduction in living standards, he said, noting also a focus on developing and implementing measures to minimize the negative impacts of the global economic crisis on the most vulnerable people. To that end, measures in support of pregnant women and maternity payments had been introduced. Ukraine considered equal representation among women and men in decision-making and increasing women's representation at senior levels of legislative and executive power as most topical.

Women and girls around the world faced discrimination and violation of their rights, he said, sharing his concerns about sexual exploitation and trafficking in human beings. Those were among the worst forms of violence against women, and Ukraine was combating it through legislative measures to foster international and regional cooperation. Indeed, human trafficking could not effectively be dealt with solely at the national level, he said, emphasizing that close bilateral and multilateral cooperation was needed.

LESLIE K. CHRISTIAN (Ghana), aligning himself with the Group of 77 and China, said his country had a long-standing commitment to working towards gender equality and women's empowerment. It had undertaken many efforts to achieve the 12 critical areas of concern underlined in the Platform. The Goals had been mainstreamed into Ghana's development policy framework, while guidelines for incorporating a gender perspective into policy formulation had been developed for all ministries, departments and agencies. In addition, policies had been designed to empower women

economically, he explained, noting that the elimination of the gender disparity in primary and secondary education was likely to be achieved by 2015.

The creation of a girls' education unit in the Ministry of Education, among other reforms like free bus rides for children, had contributed immensely to improving access to education, he said, adding that such efforts had brought Ghana close to achieving gender parity in school enrolment. He pointed out that the Speaker of Parliament, Chief Justice and Attorney-General were all women. Greater efforts would be required to meet all the Goals by 2015, and enormous challenges lay ahead in the areas of child and maternal mortality, he said. The global economic crises had exacerbated those challenges, he said, adding that Ghana would continue to strengthen its relationships with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to support national efforts.

CLAUDE HELLER (Mexico) noted that, despite international attention to the advancement of women, they continued to face obstacles in the exercise of their rights. There was a need for a comprehensive approach to combating discrimination and violence, he stressed, adding that the media and schools must play an active role in encouraging men and boys to participate in achieving gender equality. If Member States desired to build inclusive societies, they must do more to protect women with disabilities, indigenous women and migrant women, he said.

He said his country had developed strategies and programmes to combat poverty and promote women's employment. On the social level, it had made efforts towards better health and nutrition with the aim of reducing mortality and morbidity. In the last five years, Mexico's budget for gender issues had increased by more than 200 per cent, he said, noting that the Government had adopted several laws in order to fulfil its international commitments. Despite that progress, however, more must be done to achieve full equity, he stressed, calling for international support for strengthening national efforts.

Lastly, he welcomed the establishment of UN Women, noting that it would give a new impetus to an extremely relevant subject. The new entity demonstrated the commitment of Member States to gender equity for all women, and it would provide a platform for the reconciliation of different points of view. Mexico hoped the new body would be built on the basis of the experiences of other organizations, such as UNIFEM, and that it would work to strengthen programmes for women and girls within Central America.

ERTUĞRUL APAKAN (Turkey) noted that developing countries — particularly least developed countries and countries suffering from conflict — were facing a daunting challenge as hard-won progress on certain Millennium Goals was under threat. In that regard, the upcoming Summit in September was critical in addressing current gaps and developing the right policy responses to accelerate progress. "Our leaders must send a clear political message across the globe that the Millennium Goals are achievable with the right policies, adequate investment and reliable international support," he stressed.

He said that emerging donor countries had acquired a unique position in international development cooperation, and South-South cooperation had become a major form of technical cooperation among developing countries. Given that, it was time to give a fresh impetus to global partnership for development. Such cooperation, in combination with increased ODA, would benefit developing countries. However, while scaled-up and predictable ODA was critical for their development, it was not enough. Better targeted aid was needed to generate robust growth.

Emphasizing the importance of coordination and coherence in the formulation and implementation of development policies and strategies, he highlighted the efforts of the international community and non-governmental organizations to eliminate barriers to the advancement of women and girls. More work needed to be done as stubborn disparities persisted between men and women. Gender equality and women's rights were not adequately integrated in all the Millennium Development Goals, he said, noting that the issue hindered sustained progress.

AMAN HASSEN BAME (Ethiopia), aligning with the Group of 77, expressed his country's strong belief that the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were critical to

achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Despite progress made over the last 15 years, women and girls constituted the majority of the world's poor. While encouraged by the general positive trend in achieving gender parity in primary and secondary school enrolment, and in women's access to tertiary education, in sub-Saharan Africa, girls' participation in secondary education was low. They lived in poverty — in rural areas and urban slums.

He said he was similarly concerned at the uneven progress in achieving women's health. It was unacceptable that mothers should die while giving new life. He fully supported the Secretary-General's global initiative on women's and children's health, and called on Ethiopia's development partners, among others, to lend their support to implementing the Joint Action Plan for Women's and Children's Health. National measures had been taken to implement the Beijing outcomes, including the promulgation of a policy on women and the creation of strategies to mainstream a gender dimension into development programmes. Efforts to bridge the gender gap also included affirmative actions. To curb violence against women, the family law now enabled women to enjoy equal rights of inheritance, divorce and custody of children. Under the Penal Code, perpetrators of rape, among other crimes, were subjected to rigorous punishment.

NEVEN MIKEC (Croatia), aligning himself with the European Union, expressed hope that key assessment from the Annual Ministerial Review would be further acted upon at September's high-level meeting on the Millennium Development Goals. Commending the consensus achieved to realize the creation of a United Nations gender entity, Croatia believed the body's formal adoption by the General Assembly would be a significant step towards scaling up the Organization's capacity in gender-related issues. Discussing national efforts, he said the national policy for the promotion of gender equality for 2006-2010 was a key framework for implementing internationally agreed goals.

Noting that Croatia had a female Prime Minister, and that women also held Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy Speaker positions, he said women also constituted 25 per cent of parliamentarians. Thirty-five per cent of women had been appointed to high-ranking administrative positions. The Gender Equality and Free Legal Aid Acts, along with the Anti-Discrimination Act, prohibited discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital or family status and sexual orientation. He attached the utmost importance to eliminating violence against women and girls, and noted that progress on that issue had been made through implementation of the National Strategy for the Protection against Domestic Violence and its related Protocols. Croatia placed gender issues high on its national agenda and expected them to remain high on the global agenda as well, to enable sustainable progress in gender equality and women's empowerment.

RODOLFO BENÍTEZ VERNON (Cuba) said the Beijing Declaration was absolutely valid and must continue to foster the international advancement of women as a policy and regulatory framework. If commitments made on resources and ODA were not translated into reality, the agreements of the United Nations Fourth Conference on Women 15 years ago would be "a dead letter", he said, noting the need to champion lasting peace, sustainable development and an equitable international order.

He said that despite the "cruel and illegal economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed unilaterally by the United States", Cuba had managed to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. However, the blockade remained a major obstacle towards those goals. Under its national action plan, Cuba had made substantive progress in achieving equal opportunities for its women, but he recognized the need to continue efforts towards the elimination of stereotypes and the implementation of an effective gender perspective.

He highlighted progress made, but noted that the commitment to devote 0.7 per cent of developed countries' gross domestic product (GDP) as ODA was still pending — a desire and demand of his people and a "disgrace for those who wash their hands of the just aspirations and needs" of countries in need of assistance. He stressed that the fulfilment of those commitments was closely linked to the rights and principles in the United Nations Charter. Efforts must be accelerated to eliminate poverty and stop excessive military expenditures, which adversely affected development.

CARLOS ENRIQUE GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ (El Salvador), aligning with the Group of 77, said

his country appreciated women's role in all areas of development and would seek to improve their status. Describing national efforts, he said gender parity had been achieved in primary education, but adult illiteracy affected more women than men. In the area of technical training, El Salvador had promoted changes to enable women to rise to management and administrative positions. However, women continued to take jobs in *maquila* factories, and domestic work and initiatives to incorporate domestic workers in the social security system would help relieve their health and economic burdens.

El Salvador must overcome challenges, he said, noting that gender equality and women's empowerment would allow for progress in combating violence against women. In that context, the Government had proposed three strategies: to make equal rights a State policy; to improve State capacity to comply with all international conventions that promoted women's advancement; and to strengthen national women's mechanisms. In the area of the family, the Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo de la Mujer (ISDEMU) had studied sharing responsibility in domestic tasks. It also looked at how to prevent inter-family violence, ill-treatment of children and abuse. Regarding HIV/AIDS, the Government had intensified efforts for the prevention, treatment and care of those suffering from the illness. In closing, he reaffirmed El Salvador's political will to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

HASAN KLEIB (Indonesia), aligning himself with the Group of 77 and China, stressed that women "must have a space where they can fulfil their true desires, develop their talent and redefine their skills". Citing employment as a critical link in equitable wealth creation, he said the success of women in the workforce would inevitably inspire broad social transformation. Since labour was a vital driver of development, it was important to consider improving job opportunities through social protection.

Looking ahead to 2015, he said his country was on track to achieving the Millennium Goals relating to gender equality and women's empowerment, and underlined the increasing role played by women in the political sector. National mechanisms to assure women's access to economic opportunity and participation focused on increasing their economic productivity, he said, stressing that an enhanced role for women was vital to village economies and women-based micro industries.

PARK IN-KOOK (Republic of Korea) said that investing in women had had a clear, direct and positive impact on his country's national development process. The importance of expanding their economic role, especially during the downturn, could not be overemphasized, he said, adding that the Government had learned that the elevated economic status of women benefited families and communities. To speed their participation and access to credit and financial services, the Government had introduced a programme targeting female heads of household, he said. On women's health issues, he said they deserved the global community's full attention, and expressed great concern about the slow progress in reducing maternal mortality. However, he welcomed the Group of Eight's "Muskoka Initiative", through which countries, including his own, had raised \$7.3 billion to support achievement of the Millennium Goals on child health and maternal health.

Emphasizing that women's equal participation in political and economic decision-making made a significant difference in any situation, he said he had been impressed by the World Food Programme's results in post-earthquake Haiti, when it had changed its food distribution channel from men to women. With that example, he stressed that women were in a critical position to provide services for family members. Among the most critical issues was violence against women, and no effort should be spared in addressing gender-based violence in conflict, post-conflict and post-crisis situations, he said. The ability to tackle such issues hinged on the efficiency of the United Nations, and in that context, he expressed satisfaction with the conclusion of recent negotiations on the new gender entity.

CELESTINO MIGLIORE, Permanent Observer for the Holy See, noted the remarkable progress made in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women, highlighting the efforts of those countries considered to be lagging behind. Women's empowerment presupposed universal human dignity, he said, stressing that "equality is not sameness, and difference is not inequality".

He went on to say that if domesticity could be considered a particular gift for mothers in

cultivating a genuine intrapersonal relationship in their family and society, attention should be given to family-friendly working arrangements, shared family-care leave and the redistribution of unpaid work. He noted with concern the persistence of discrimination, exploitation and oppression of women and girls, and called for adequate national protection measures.

Women's economic empowerment, was essential for the economic development of family and society, he stressed. Access to land and property, credit facilities and equal opportunities for financial services would help ensure their economic stability. The whole household and community should therefore support women's entrepreneurship. With regard to violence against women, he called for the use of adequate legal frameworks and national policies to bring perpetrators to justice and provide women with rehabilitation services. "Women and girls must be guaranteed their full enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including equal access to education and health care," he stressed in closing.

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