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Commission on the Status of Women  
Fifty-fifth Session  
2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Meetings\* (AM & PM)

**WITH GLOBAL REPORT CARD ON IMPROVING WOMEN'S STATUS DECIDEDLY MIXED,  
INVESTMENT IN GIRLS' EDUCATION URGED, AS COMMISSION OPENS SESSION**

**'To Plan for a Day, Catch a Fish; to Plan for a Year, Plant Rice; to Plan  
For a Decade, Plant a Tree; to Plan for a Lifetime, Educate a Girl,' Meeting Hears**

While the last year had seen significant efforts to improve women's status around the world — including the landmark creation of the United Nations new gender entity, UN Women — the global report card was decidedly mixed, but investment in girls' education could propel both economic growth and women's equality, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro said today, as she opened the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

During the Commission's two-week session, delegations would work to agree on priority actions to address persistent obstacles to implementing the landmark 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which provide a blueprint for improving women's opportunities worldwide. The day featured two parallel high-level round table discussions under the session's main theme of "Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work".

In opening remarks, Ms. Migiro said two thirds of illiterate adults were women, a statistic that had not changed in 20 years. Global commitments to achieving universal primary education and gender parity at all levels of schooling had improved girls' enrolment and retention rates in many countries. However, the quality of education had not kept pace, particularly in poor countries, where many children left school without basic literacy and mathematics skills. The Commission could help "connect the dots" among the issues affecting women's prospects, and she urged delegates to shine a spotlight on areas of concern.

Agreeing, Michelle Bachelet, the first Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment — UN Women — underlined the enormous responsibility shared by that new body, the Commission and the global community in the quest for gender equality. "Discrimination and inequality are the problem; women are part of the solution," she declared, stressing that women's potential must be tapped to create a better future. Frank analysis was needed about the myriad challenges countries faced today.

UN Women, she said, envisioned a world in which the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment were firmly integrated in the development, human rights and peace and security agendas. To meet that objective, the new entity would centre its work on five core principles, which included providing demand-driven support to national partners to enhance

implementation of international agreements and standards.

In the area of education, she said, expanding access was not enough — it was crucial to improve the quality and relevance of education. Gender stereotypes were a root cause of occupational segregation and must be tackled systematically. Education was also insufficient for helping women gain access to decent work, and protective measures like job-search training and gender-sensitive social protection schemes were needed. The Commission's agreed conclusions would provide a first step on the road ahead. They must be followed up at the national level, work which UN Women — and the entire United Nations system at the country level — stood ready to help undertake.

Rounding out the plenary, Economic and Social Council President Lazarus Kapambwe (Zambia) said investment in women's and girls' education had a multiplier effect on the well-being of families and the development of their communities and nations. In turn, those investments led to faster poverty reduction and more sustainable economic growth, proving the Chinese saying that “to plan for a day, catch a fish; to plan for a year, plant rice; to plan for a decade, plant a tree; but to plan for a lifetime, educate a girl”.

In other matters, the Commission elected Tetsuya Ashiki (Japan) to represent the Asian Group on its Bureau, which already included Maria Luz Melon (Argentina), Filippo Cinti (Italy) and Leysa Sow (Senegal), who also served as Rapporteur.

The Commission also confirmed the appointment of Efraim Gomez (Sweden) to serve on the Working Group on Communications during the current session. He joined Cho Hyung-hwa (Republic of Korea), Kadra Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti), Irina Velichko (Belarus) and Julio Peralta (Paraguay).

The Commission also adopted its provisional agenda (document E/CN.6/2011/1) and approved its programme of work contained in addendum 1 to the provisional agenda.

Also making opening statements during the morning session were Silvia Pimentel, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and Emine Erdoğan, wife of the Prime Minister of Turkey.

Statements in the general discussion were also made by the ministers and high-level officials of Hungary (on behalf of the European Union), Namibia (on behalf of the Southern African Development Community), Bahamas (on behalf of the Caribbean Community), Kiribati, Georgia, Ghana, Brazil and the Republic of Korea.

Representatives of Argentina (on behalf of the “Group of 77” developing countries and China), Chile (on behalf of the Rio Group), (on behalf of the Pacific Island Forum), Indonesia (Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Mexico also spoke.

Participating this afternoon in round table A were Fortunato de la Peña, Vice-Chair of the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development and Undersecretary for Science and Technology of the Philippines; Barbara Bailey, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; and Joy Carter, International Federation of University Women. Garen Nazarian (Armenia) chaired the discussion.

Participating this afternoon in round table B were Josefina Vázquez Mota, Member of Parliament and former Minister of Education, Mexico; Jane Hodges, International Labour Organization (ILO); and Deepali Sood, Plan International. Kazuo Kodama (Japan) chaired the discussion.

The Commission on the Status of Women will reconvene at 10 a.m. Wednesday, 23 February, to continue its session.

### Background

The Commission on the Status of Women met today to begin its fifty-fifth session, which will run until 4 March, bringing together Government officials and United Nations representatives, civil society, the media and the private sector. The session's priority theme is "Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work". For background, please see Press Release [WOM/1839](#) of 18 February.

### Opening Statements

Chairperson GAREN NAZARIAN ( [Armenia](#)), opening the fifty-fifth session, underscored that "we meet at a moment of tremendous expectations" and promise. In recent years, States and other stakeholders had strengthened the basis for gender equality, women's rights and empowerment, and it was now time to ensure that commitments were turned into reality. The creation of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women — UN Women — had generated unprecedented action towards that goal.

Among the key tasks ahead, he said, was to monitor progress made in and obstacles to implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as to review the status of previously agreed instruments. Recalling this year's theme — Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work — he said inequalities persisted. He encouraged the Commission's deliberations to result in a set of agreed conclusions to guide stakeholders towards implementation of the Declaration and Action Platform.

United Nations Deputy Secretary-General ASHA-ROSE MIGIRO said "this has been a significant 12 months for gender equality and women's empowerment", citing the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Millennium Development Goals summit last September, which had recognized gender equality and women's empowerment, not just as key goals, but as instrumental to achieving other international targets. The past year also had seen the tenth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and the creation of UN Women to galvanize efforts worldwide. It would be launched officially in two days.

"Make no mistake, this is a landmark commitment by Member States," she said of that new body, also acknowledging the years of advocacy by the women's movement. UN Women would build on international norms and policies developed by the United Nations over decades, and work throughout the system to boost coherence and ensure accountability. Moreover, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had identified women's empowerment as a strategic opportunity for 2011. In the past four years, women holding senior leadership posts had increased, and work would continue to improve the number of women in middle management. The Secretary-General would also bolster the United Nations capacity to combat violence against women and children.

Turning to the Commission's theme, she said investing in women and girls was a force multiplier, with education among the best investments. It was a key driver of economic growth and catalyst for women's empowerment. Despite that, two thirds of illiterate adults were women, a statistic that had not changed in the past 20 years. Many girls left school without basic literacy or math skills, and remained underrepresented in fields such as science and technology. For its part, the Commission could help "connect the dots" among the issues affecting women's prospects and

well-being. She also looked for to the Commission's contributions to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, "Rio+20", in 2012, and urged delegates to keep "shining a spotlight" on the critical issues, especially discrimination and violence against the girl child.

The President of the Economic and Social Council, LAZAROUS KAPAMBWE ([Zambia](#)), said UN Women was expeditiously moving towards making a difference in the lives of women and girls around the world, particularly in developing countries. Member States must equally demonstrate the necessary political will to ensure that the entity, under the dynamic leadership of Michelle Bachelet, succeeded.

He said of the Commission's theme that education was a basic human right, and the last decade had seen remarkable improvements in that realm, particularly at the primary level. Investing in women's and girls' education had "positive multiplier effects on the well-being of their families and the development of their communities and nations. Those investments led to faster poverty reduction and more sustainable economic growth, proving the Chinese saying that "to plan for a day, catch a fish; to plan for a year, plant rice; to plan for a decade, plant a tree; but to plan for a lifetime, educate a girl".

Still, however, the majority of children and adolescents out of school were girls, and the gaps were significant in many countries, especially developing ones, he said. Gender stereotypes permeated society, segregating men and women in their studies and career paths, and greatly challenging women's transition into the labour market. Globally, women had participated in the labour market at a rate of 52.6 per cent in 2008, while men's participation rate was 77.5 per cent. Among the 20 to 24 year-old population, women lagged behind men in labour-force participation in all regions.

Underlining how recent global crises had slowed progress in all spheres of social development, including education, he said no country could develop in a sustainable way without women's full and effective participation. Governments had primary responsibility for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, but partnerships and strategic alliances among all stakeholders were key. The Economic and Social Council, in its July session, would monitor progress in implementing its 2010 Ministerial Declaration on gender equality and the empowerment of women to enhance accountability among all stakeholders.

MICHELLE BACHELET, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, underlined the enormous responsibility shared by the Commission, the newly created Gender Entity and the global community to work strategically and visibly in support of the collective quest for gender equality. Development analysts increasingly presented evidence that gender equality was central to economic and social development, peace and democracy. Around the world, more groups were advocating to protect women's rights, while more women were taking their place alongside men in using new technologies in creative ways towards economic and political goals.

She highlighted the Commission's usefulness as a forum to share innovation, best practise and experiences about what worked and how the policy and legal reforms secured in individual Member States contributed to concrete changes in the lives of women and girls. It was also the place to recommit to additional measures needed to accelerate progress. Indeed, the Commission knew better than others that progress was uneven and fragile. Among other things, too many women and girls were trafficked, lacked access to basic services and faced unemployment rates well above levels seen before the current global jobs crisis.

In this time of crisis, she urged delegations to seize new opportunities and to guard against postponing efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment until more stable conditions prevailed, warning that the lack of equality impeded development. "Discrimination and inequality are the problem; women are part of the solution," she asserted, stressing that "we must

fully tap women's potential and creativity for a better future”.

Frank analysis about the challenges that different countries faced, as well as how the world community could work together at national, regional and global levels were needed, she said. UN Women provided a strengthened opportunity to do so. Its recent creation made the current session of the Commission particularly important. Outlining recent progress in making UN Women operational, she said the vision on which the Entity was grounded was of a world in which women and men had equal rights and opportunities and in which the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment were firmly integrated in the development, human rights and peace and security agendas.

To meet that objective, she said, UN women would centre its work around five core principles: providing demand-driven support to national partners to enhance implementation of international agreements and standards; supporting intergovernmental processes to strengthen the global normative and policy framework on gender equality; advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment and championing the rights of women and girls, particularly the most excluded; leading and promoting coherence towards gender equality throughout the United Nations system; and acting as a global broker of knowledge and experience to align practice with normative guidance.

Continuing, she said UN Women would focus on five thematic priorities in its operational activities: expanding women's voices, leadership and participation; ending violence against women by enabling States to set up the mechanisms needed to formulate and enforce laws, policies and services to protect women and girls; strengthening implementation of the women, peace and security agenda; enhancing women's economic empowerment, including in the context of global economic and environmental crises; and making gender equality priorities central to national, local and sectoral planning and budgeting.

She reported that the Entity had completed its alignment of the existing staff to the new structure and had finalized a field-capacity assessment to guide future investments in its country-level teams. It supported all ongoing programmatic commitments and mandates of the former four entities. She hoped to make senior appointments to her management team very soon and to ensure that the Entity's staff in New York was working from one location to start real institutional culture change.

Turning to the Commission's current session, she said the theme could not be more timely. Yet, in the analysis of UN Women, expanding access to education was not enough. Also crucial was to improve the quality and relevance of education. Gender stereotypes were a root cause of occupational segregation, and they must be tackled systematically. Education was also insufficient for women to gain access to decent work. Protective measures such as job-search training and gender-sensitive social protective schemes were needed. Because science and technology insufficiently responded to the needs of both women and girls, the content of research and development should be made gender-sensitive and user-driven. Societies must prioritize women's innovation potential. Moreover, women must be encouraged to have equal access to information and communications technology training and education.

The Commission's agreed conclusions would be only a first step, she said, noting that they must be followed up at the national level. In that regard, UN Women and the entire United Nations system were ready to aid Member States. The current session was an opportunity to bridge the implementation gap and accelerate action in ending violence and discrimination against the girl child, while the Commission's focus on the emerging issue of gender equality and sustainable development would allow it to influence debates of global significance.

Surveying a number of relevant United Nations reports, she said the Organization had a particular responsibility to achieve gender balance and to lead by example. More work was needed in

that area, given that gender balance had been achieved only at the “P-1” and “P-2” levels. In that context, she highlighted the recommendations of the Secretary-General’s report on the improvement in the status of women in the United Nations system, including the need for senior leadership sponsorship, enhanced monitoring and accountability, and more rigorous implementation of existing policies, including special measures for women and flexible working arrangements. She promised that UN Women would work to implement that agenda.

SILVIA PIMENTEL, Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, presented the main outcomes of the Committee’s forty-sixth, forty-seventh and forty-eighth sessions, saying that reports of 20 States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women had been considered, and concluding observations adopted in that regard. Areas of concern raised by the Committee had related to trafficking and exploitation of women, including prostitution, and a lack of awareness-raising and training programmes to combat gender stereotypes, among others.

Turning to the forty-seventh session, she said the Committee had adopted two general recommendations: one on the “Core Obligations of States Parties under Article 2 of the Convention”, which contained a broad obligation to eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms; and another on “Older Women and the Protection of their Human Rights”. The Committee also had continued work on the draft general recommendation on the economic consequences of marriage and its dissolution, with hope of adopting it by the end of the year. Further, work had begun on the general recommendation on women in armed conflict and post-conflict situations, while a decision had been taken to draft a general recommendation on access to justice.

The Committee’s interaction with the human rights machinery was important for its overall activity, she said, highlighting work with United Nations entities and specialized agencies, especially in the provision of country-specific information for the purposes of constructive dialogue with States parties. The Committee was currently working with UN Women on two of its draft recommendations. Moreover, it had met with special mandate holders, including the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, in exchanges that were of utmost importance in the quest to strengthen links with those entities. It also had participated in the inter-Chairpersons meetings and working groups with a view to boosting the treaty body framework.

Through dialogue with States parties, the Committee could attest to progress made in realizing women’s human rights, she said, pointing to the withdrawal of reservations to the Convention, increased attention to creating a legal framework for promoting and protecting women’s rights, and the establishment of national machineries for women’s advancement, among other things. Despite such gains, however, full equality for women in law and practice had not been achieved in any country. Women continued to suffer “profound and pervasive” human rights violations, such as gender-based violence, and the Committee was increasingly concerned that discrimination based on sex and gender was “inextricably linked” with other factors, such as age and disability.

With that, she reiterated the Committee’s readiness to continue its cooperation with the Commission in the pursuit of common goals.

Speaking as a special guest, EMINE ERDOĞAN, wife of the Prime Minister of Turkey, said the theme of the session was important and timely, as “women continue to cry for help”. She had seen women in Pakistan who had lost everything after unprecedented floods last year. In Sarajevo, she had met women whose dignity had been cruelly attacked, while in Iraq, she had encountered women who had lost their husbands and indeed, their future. In Gaza and Ramallah, women had lost “their hopes, their breath and their rights”. In war, women and children had become targets.

“What women want are their rights,” she said, pointing to education, work and equal status.

They wanted to learn and to be informed — for themselves, for their children and for their future. They wished to be treated with dignity. In Turkey, many efforts were under way. The country continued to hold accession talks with the European Union, while regionally and globally it strove to increase its influence. Within those developments, women's rights, education and employment were improving. "We leave behind historical bias and prejudice," she stressed.

For her part, she said she had led a campaign through which 350,000 women and girls were able to attend school, noting also that political and social rights were improving. In 2010, a constitutional amendment had been developed to improve women's human rights. As Turkish women had achieved universal suffrage in 1934, today they had a greater presence in politics. Violence against women was not tolerated; penalties were imposed on the perpetrators. In sum, decisions taken during the Commission's fifty-fifth session would impact women around the world, and Turkey would continue to support its work.

### General Discussion

Speaking on behalf of the European Union, MIKLÓS RÉTHELYI, Minister for National Resources of Hungary, said gender equality and women's empowerment was pursued in all of the Union's policies, in line with its recent declaration and strategy on that issue. The strategy's first priority was the equal economic independence of women. By taking a life-cycle perspective, it emphasized that decisions taken in early life would affect situations later on. To that end, the strategy aimed to affect the situation of both women and men in all stages of their lives.

The Union hoped that the United Nations system would strengthen its capacities to promote gender equality, he said, affirming the Union's strong support for the Cairo and Copenhagen Programmes of Action, among others. Gender equality could not be achieved without guaranteeing women's sexual and reproductive rights, and the Union was determined to ensure women's rights in all walks of life. In June 2010, it had adopted an action plan on women's equality and empowerment in development for the next five years. Among other things, it pledged support for that process, including in the context of the Millennium Development Goals.

While access to education remained relatively high throughout the countries of the European Union, he expressed concern that the pattern of dropping out of school early was higher for girls and women. Moreover, women were not equally rewarded in the economic sphere. Despite achievements in the realm of primary and secondary education throughout Europe, it was clear that in a rapidly changing world, lifelong learning was increasingly key to economic success. In that regard more work was needed. Similarly, further efforts were necessary to ensure women's wider access to the labour market. That was particularly true in the "STEM" fields — science, technology, economy and math.

JORGE ARGÜELLO (Argentina), speaking on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, recalled that his delegation had engaged actively in the process that had led to the creation of UN Women, especially with a "forward-looking" document containing essential elements of the new entity submitted to the co-facilitators of the system-wide coherence process.

Despite such progress, he said, obstacles remained to implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as to the outcome of the General Assembly's twenty-third special session on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". Poverty was a major challenge for women, while girls accounted for the majority of children out of school. Violence against women and girls persisted in every country around the world. Women still suffered the impacts of conflict.

Peace was inextricably linked to equality and development, he said, calling on States to prioritize the plight of women living under foreign occupation and work to end their suffering. New

threats were also emerging, and the impacts of the global crises in finance, food, energy and climate change must be addressed. Stressing the importance of more international cooperation to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, he reaffirmed the Group's commitment to implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

DOREEN SIOKA, Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare of Namibia, speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and aligning her remarks with those made on behalf of the Group of 77 and the African Group, highlighted science, technology and innovation as essential tools for accelerating the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. Policymakers had a key role to play in integrating a gender perspective in those areas, she said, stressing that to harness the full potential of science and technology for development, women must have equal access to knowledge and skills in both fields.

She said that in seeking to meet its social and economic aspirations, SADC recognized the important role of human-resource development in political, economic and social development. The Community had identified education as the most important tool for equipping its peoples with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to be able to drive and achieve the region's vision. To that end, it had entered into a partnership in 2000 to include education and training as a key area for regional cooperation and integration. Its overall goal was to develop and strengthen national systems of innovation.

Noting the accelerating trend towards qualification frameworks in developing, classifying and recognizing formal learning across Africa, she said SADC was actively engaged in developing such a framework and the idea of a SADC regional qualifications framework had become embedded in a host of regional policy directives and strategies. The Community's Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation had adopted a road map in March 2010 to develop that framework. Concluding, she called for enhanced international cooperation, including fulfilment of commitment of internationally agreed official development assistance (ODA), debt relief, market access, capacity-building and technical support.

OCTAVIO ERRÁZURIZ (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said his delegation was deeply committed to gender equality and women's empowerment, efforts that were critical to achieving social and economic development. The attainment of full democracy was only possible in conditions of genuine equality between men and women. On the formulation of the strategic plan of the Executive Board of UN Women, any methodology adopted for the design of programmes on the ground and allocation of resources for gender issues must include indicators specific to advancing women worldwide. He trusted that the integration of the former International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) would result in work of greater impact and be generously supported.

Urging more attention to issues such as trafficking of women and girls, and the feminization of poverty and HIV/AIDS, he also called for strengthened international dialogue to better address the needs of women and girls in all policies. The "Brasilia Consensus", adopted at the eleventh Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in July 2010, called for women's greater economic empowerment, among other things. The Rio Group was committed to boosting measures to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, as well as the smuggling and exploitation of migrants.

He said it was essential to integrate a gender perspective into all political, social and economic programmes to ensure women's full empowerment. He also expected the working group of independent experts on discrimination against women in law and practice to exchange views with States on best practices to eliminate discriminatory laws. He attached importance to the protection of migrant women and girls, and stressed the need to adopt measures to ensure that women and girls



with disabilities were not subjected to multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination. In sum, national gender mechanisms must be strengthened, as must international cooperation to support national initiatives in developing countries.

LORETTA BUTLER-TURNER, Minister of State for Social Development of the Bahamas, speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and aligning her remarks with those made on behalf of the Group of 77, welcomed the establishment of UN Women. She hoped the calls for a new gender architecture over the years would evolve and generate concrete results and change for women worldwide. CARICOM was particularly mindful, however, that the lack of adequate funding posed a formidable challenge and could undermine the assistance to national partners. She called on members to make voluntary contributions to UN Women's core budget.

Noting the focus of the Commission's current session, she underlined its relevance to accelerating achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. While technological advancement had brought about significant change in many countries, developing countries were lagging behind. To that end, she said the findings and recommendations of the first Caribbean Conference Science and Technology, held in Trinidad and Tobago in September 1998, remained relevant. Accordingly, information and communications technology projects were being pursued in schools throughout the Caribbean region to promote access to technology and to deliver quality education for young people.

She highlighted the role of the Caribbean Council of Science and Technology in increasing women's and girls' access to and participation in the fields of science and technology. Among other initiatives, a reader-friendly and graphic-filled kids' version of its publication, *Caribbean Icons in Science and Technology*, had been made available. A project entitled "Math Made Easy" was also disseminating innovative resource materials to encourage mathematics at the primary level.

Ensuring balance, equity and non-discrimination in the creation of a knowledgeable, skilled and technical workforce was equally important, she said, stressing that traditional roles must be expanded to allow women greater access. Although the reversal of male dominance in tertiary enrolment in favour of women and figures showing that women accounted for slightly more than a quarter of all scientific researchers were positive signs, it was very far from parity. Cultural and attitudinal biases and family expectations must still be changed.

Highlighting the continuing dire situation of Haiti, she appealed to Member States to make good on their pledges of assistance, bearing in mind that the women and girls of Haiti bore the brunt of the country's suffering.

KOURAITI BENIATO, Minister for Internal and Social Affairs of Kiribati, speaking on behalf of the Pacific Island Forum, said the countries and territories of the Pacific were at different stages of achieving gender commitments and had inadequate resources to meet them fully in either the short or long term. Despite that, in August 2010, the eleventh Pacific Triennial Conference for Women had been held in New Caledonia to review national and regional implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In primary and secondary schools in most countries, gender equality in access to education had been achieved, or was close to it.

However, women's marginalization in areas such as trades or sciences stemmed from social attitudes and practices that classified women into particular fields of work, he explained, citing a lack of female role models in the sciences. Scarce data on the quality of education, including the extent to which it perpetuated gender stereotypes, was a major constraint, and definitions of literacy also warranted more research. Countries in the Pacific recognized the powerful role of teachers and academics in advocating human rights principles, but the "Community and Education and Training Centre" was the only regional institution offering community development training for women.

In other areas, he said, gender equality measures were in place in most education ministries, largely as a result of donor influence. The priority now was for Governments to strengthen technical and vocational training for women in fields with the greatest opportunities. In 2010, Palau, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Papua New Guinea and Australia had submitted reports under the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council and were slated to appear before the Committee this year. Finally, he stressed the need to include gender in formulating climate change mitigation and adaptation activities, and to make use of women's expertise in the development of new technology and approaches to address that phenomenon.

HASAN KLEIB (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and aligning his remarks with those made on behalf of the Group of 77, affirmed the importance of gender equality. ASEAN would undertake further action to ensure the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, as well as the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. It had sought, at the first meeting of its Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, held last week in Jakarta, to promote the well-being, development, empowerment and participation of women and children in the ASEAN community-building process. Some of the thematic issues for the Commission's future work plan directly correlated with the global priorities and issues being address by the Commission on the Status of Women.

Underlining the multiple roles of women in the family, in society and in nation-building, he said women deserved to be given full support, facilities and opportunities to enable them to undertake their myriad tasks effectively. Education was a vital building block in that regard. It removed economic, socio-cultural and political barriers and provided the means to achieving a more balanced and equal relationship between women and men. It was also vital to couple science with education, in order to allow women to develop their technical competencies.

He went on to say that ASEAN was promoting and investing in education and lifelong learning, human-resource training and capacity-building to address women's unequal representation among the poor. It also aimed to ensure equal access to adequate and affordable public and social services and to achieve universal access to primary education across its member countries by 2015. Gender-responsive skills training programmes were currently being developed. Goals had been set to develop a workforce with higher levels of information and communications technology proficiency and expertise. The active mainstreaming of a gender perspective was being promoted in the design, implementation and evaluation of regional, national and local policies.

DAVID BAKRADZE, Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, said his country had been named by the World Bank as top reformer in the last five years. The most difficult part of such modernization was not economic or political, but rather mental, aimed at achieving a free, open, multiethnic and tolerant society that guaranteed gender equality and enabled women to use their creative potential for the benefit of society. Indeed, women's empowerment would bring about great promise and equally great achievement. A new law on gender equality had entered into force in April 2010, while the Gender Equality Council had been established to coordinate State policies.

Among other efforts, he noted the design of a plan which envisaged the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). That was essential for his country, as a significant part of it was under occupation, with women comprising the majority of internally displaced persons. Other challenges included early marriage, a high abortion rate, the feminization of poverty — especially among the internally displaced persons — and gender-based violence. To address those issues, the Government had elaborated a national plan to fight domestic violence and set up State-funded shelters for victims. Among the successes had been the appointment of three female ministers. Iso, women comprised 55 per cent of university students.

JULIANA AZUMAH-MENSAH, Minister for Women and Children's Affairs of Ghana, aligning with the Group of 77, urged UN Women to factor existing regional structures, such as the African Union, into its ongoing study on field capacities, which would complement the review of national capacities. Describing national efforts, she said science, mathematics and technology education clinics had been established to address the gender imbalance and misperceptions about girls' participation in those areas.

She said that the experience gained had provided a basis for the creation of the Girls Education Unit. The goal of the clinics — as yet to be achieved — was to see 30—per cent of female students at the tertiary level taking up science, technology and mathematics. Though the goal remained elusive, there had been some positive results — students now were better able to deal with gender stereotypes associated with female participation in “non-traditional” careers and student enrolment in science and mathematics had also increased. Ghana hoped to enhance collaboration with UN Women and its development partners. That, in turn, required greater institutional capacity.

IRINY LOPES, Minister in the Secretariat of Policies for Women of Brazil, said her country was, with the election of Dilma Rousseff as its first woman President and the appointment of nine female ministers, experiencing a historical moment. Never before had so many women occupied the highest posts of Brazil's federal Government. At the same time, the United Nations was experiencing its own unique moment with the establishment of UN Women. Brazil was proud to be a member of that entity's first Executive Board.

She said that the Brazilian Government believed it could not achieve its goal of eradicating extreme poverty without making substantial investments in education, science, technology and innovation and without facing the so-called structural inequalities of gender and race. The Secretariat of Policies for Women thus combined poverty eradication with the promotion of economic, social and political autonomy of women. Brazil welcomed the General Assembly's proclamation of 2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent. Brazil would also hold the Third National Conference of Policies for Women, providing a chance to evaluate progress and define new priorities for the National Plan of Policies for Women. In closing, she highlighted the elaboration of new international parameters, such as the proposal of an Inter-American Convention on Sexual and Reproductive Rights and an International Convention on Domestic Work.

MARÍA DEL ROCÍO GARCÍA GAYTÁN, President of the National Institute for Women of Mexico, confirmed her country's commitment to the women's agenda, noting that it had submitted its seventh and eighth reports on compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in 2010. The Mexican Government continued to make further progress in harmonizing its laws with the women's agenda. Among other things, it had earmarked a special budget for women's empowerment and gender equality and had increased that budget by 36.59 per cent in 2011. At the municipal level, more than 1,000 organizations aimed at supporting gender equality. Mexico sought to strengthen a culture of equality at the national level in its military and had established a secretariat in that area.

Mexico had adopted a plan to address gaps in its provision of services to women, particularly in rural and underserved areas, she said. In 2009, the World Bank had recognized the work of Mexico, among countries in its region, to reconcile the Mexican woman's experience in the workplace and at home. In the political arena, the Government continued to make further strides by promoting women's access to leadership positions.

PAIK HEE-YOUNG, Minister of Gender Equality and Family of the Republic of Korea, said that being among the first Executive Board members of UN Women, her Government planned to raise its contribution to \$4.7 million, more than 100 times its current level. Efforts to ensure greater participation of women and girls in non-discriminatory education and to mainstream women from

marginalized positions were critical to realizing hopes around the world. Education for girls was not only the most effective tool to empower women, but also the most crucial investment in the future.

Her Government provided equal education opportunities to girls and boys. Primary school attendance exceeded 100 per cent as of 2009.

She said her Government was placing more emphasis on gender equality through a multifaceted analysis of curriculum, textbooks and other educational materials, while the 2002 Act on Supporting Women in Science and Technology promoted female participation in engineering, science and technology. Also, the Government was fostering women's advancement in those fields through the "4W" projects, which had resulted in increased female employment in public science and technology research institutions. To improve female representation in all areas of society, the "Dynamic Women Korea 2010" plan had been devised, as part of overall Government efforts towards women's full and equal participation in policymaking.

### Round Table A

Launching round table A with a keynote address, FORTUNATO DE LA PEÑA, Vice-Chair of the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development and Undersecretary for Science and Technology of the Philippines, pointed out that women worldwide were undereducated, had fewer credentials and were underemployed in science and technology fields. In the Philippines, women comprised half of those working in the research and development sector. Science and technology courses specifically designed for women had been successful in fostering women's participation in such fields as engineering.

The challenges women faced were not limited to the home or the farm, but also in laboratories and classrooms, he observed. At primary and secondary levels, fewer girls than boys chose to pursue science and technology fields. In colleges and universities, women were less represented in the physical sciences, engineering and mathematics — the impacts of which had been seen in women's decreasing representation in scientific fields. A study by the Commission on Science and Technology for Development highlighted such challenges and means to empower women in that regard. It urged that gender dimensions of men and women be integrated into all stages of policymaking, while policies themselves should be based on evidence and research.

One important area in which women participated was formal and informal private enterprise, he said, adding that the Science and Technology Commission's Gender Advisory Board had noted that women who held leadership positions in medium-sized and large enterprises were important for countries' ability to compete in global innovation systems. The Science and Technology Commission would review progress in reaching targets set by the World Summit on the Information Society over the last five years. In sum, the Science and Technology Commission would count on Governments, academics and civil society to realize the potential of the information society.

In the wide-ranging exchange that followed, ministers and other high-level officials highlighted success stories and outlined national efforts to help women reach their full potential, notably by helping working women achieve a balance with family responsibilities, and encouraging companies to implement family-friendly policies. One speaker cited her Government's funding of projects in which non-governmental organizations, employers and territorial governments supported women's participation in non-traditional fields. Another noted that there were now more women than men under age 50 with bachelor degrees in her country, meaning that a generation of women was better qualified than their brothers. As a result, women's labour-force participation had increased and the pay gap had narrowed.

Despite the many successes, many speakers asserted, women were still underrepresented in the highest levels of decision-making in economic, political and social spheres, meaning that

national systems had to be retooled. There was still too little focus on women and girls with disabilities in education programmes, one delegate observed, while others noted a lack of attention to indigenous women's particular needs. In Afghanistan, that country's delegate said, women's literacy rate was around 21 per cent, among the world's lowest, due to a lack of parental motivation to send girls to school, among many other factors.

Some participants offered suggestions for improvement. Skills in science and technology must begin in early basic education, South Africa's representative stressed, which was why her Government had made decreasing the dropout rate among girls a national priority, seen in the creation of schools that specialized in educating girls in science and technology. "We should bring on board the women already engaged in productive activities," Zimbabwe's representative offered, in order to learn how such work could be enhanced through innovation, including information and communications technology. Her Government was working with a local non-governmental organization, which provided such technologies to women in urban and rural areas.

Responding to that discussion on behalf of the United Nations, BARBARA BAILEY, expert in the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, said three rights were summed up in the theme of today's round table: the right to education, rights within education (option for free choice) and the right to a safe environment in which to be educated, free from sexual politics.

Providing an overview of trends, she said women's rights to education had been largely realized, with the most significant inroad having been made at the tertiary level. While globally women were increasingly seizing opportunities for higher education, they often pursued "feminized" fields of study and were underrepresented in technical trades, with key implications for future employment.

Rights within education had yet to be realized, she observed, as women were less exposed to opportunities leading to decent work conditions. Although education had improved women's lives, the potential for education to make a strategic difference in women's empowerment might be overstated, she said. To find solutions, the root causes for that gap had to be examined. Instead, however, international women's movements and United Nations conferences had forced Governments and non-governmental organizations to work towards strategic goals. Women's greater control over their sexuality had reduced reproductive rates, she added.

The most fundamental factor accounting for the gap between women's educational attainment and position in formal, informal and care sectors was an entrenched patriarchal system that served traditional interest and motive, she said. There had not been a shift in the perception of men's role in the private domain, as that perception was premised on the male "breadwinner" ideology, which was pivotal to a hegemonic masculinity and male heterosexual identity. The "breadwinner" paradigm was now under threat, with an increasing number of households headed by women. The impetus for change was mainly on the part of women, with men holding on to a seemingly fragile idea of male identity.

As for the way forward, the most critical action must be a re-engineering of women's education, she observed, adding: "We have to look at education very differently." The playing field could be levelled only with the acceptance of the need for a more equitable burden-sharing in the household. That could be achieved through re-socialization of both men and women. Most importantly, only political will would lead to the transformation of systems.

Providing a non-governmental organization perspective, Joy Carter of the International Federation of University Women, citing a recent newspaper article, said that at every level, women today were still invisible, patronized, objectified and demeaned in daily life. Statistics from the United Kingdom showed that, in the engineering field, only 15 per cent were women. Much more must be done to address such issues. Warning that "high-level" statistics could hide the problem, she stressed the urgent need for disaggregated data to drill down to the heart of the problems.

Role models also were crucially important at every stage of the education system, she said. Half as many women as men graduating with degrees in science, technology and engineering entered jobs in those fields, and the question as to why must be answered. Finally, she underscored the importance of child care to enhance the balance of work-family life. Appropriate use of e-technology in that regard was crucial. The onus was on all Governments, but also on individuals.

Mr. Nazarian (Armenia) chaired the high-level round table. Also participating in the discussion were the representatives of the Republic of Korea, Greece, Qatar, Barbados, Canada, Norway, Cameroon, Belgium, Nicaragua, Argentina, Lithuania, United Republic of Tanzania, Niger, Finland, Guatemala, Gabon, Botswana, Timor-Leste, Paraguay, Nigeria, Pakistan, Mexico, Egypt, New Zealand, Kazakhstan, El Salvador, Uruguay and Ireland.

### Round Table B

A parallel round table, which was chaired by Kazuo Kodama (Japan), featured Josefina Vázquez Mota, Member of Parliament and former Minister of Education of Mexico, as its keynote speaker. The United Nations response was delivered by Jane Hodges of the International Labour Organization (ILO), while the non-governmental organization response was given by Deepali Sood of Plan International.

Opening the discussion, Ms. VÁZQUEZ MOTA said that after a long march to advance women's rights, the current task was building full citizenship for all women. Abandoning the role of passive agents, women today were becoming dynamic actors for social change, and the Commission provided a special space to discuss the means of speeding up that process. Education had long been discussed as the central tool for achieving social change. But while societies could use education to free themselves from fears and, to a large extent, despair, it was nevertheless clear that education alone was not sufficient for changing the situation of women around the world. Indeed, public policies would have a substantive impact only if they increased women's well-being and wealth.

In that regard, she cautioned that educational opportunities for women were too often based on stereotypes, and subsequently emphasized the care of others rather than leadership. Thus, programmes that eliminated gender stereotypes were needed. Competitive options were also needed to translate gains in the educational fields into advances in the labour market. Even as women became an increasingly large portion of the labour force, their quantitative gains did not always eliminate the stratifications in the workforce, particularly in the area of compensation. New contracts and labour flexibility were needed to allow working mothers and inexperienced workers to gain employment, particularly in information technology fields.

She further stressed that success would be possible only if false concepts were eliminated across all areas of society. That included the mindset that the care of children and the elderly was women's work. Towards that end, inequalities experienced by women and girls within their own households must not be ignored. Unless all types of governmental and social institutions cultivated cultures of equality, countries would continue to fail in harnessing their full resources.

Underlining the role legislation could play in support of women's equality, she cited such concrete examples as mandating the provision of high-quality child care and the provision of health-care services during hours that did not preclude labourers from using them. It must also be acknowledged that citizenship was incomplete without such an economic component, and women citizens should be given the economic opportunities that made them economic citizens.

Concluding, she said that the women of the world had never been given anything for free. Nor had they been asked about their desire to hold high leadership positions. Rather, they were usually called upon to contribute to policies requiring hard work, but were rarely consulted about

leadership decisions. The time had come for questions to be put aside regarding the competency of women to participate in high-level decision-making processes and for women to seize the mechanisms of leadership.

During the ensuing discussion, which addressed gender equality in education and women's advancement in the workforce, and frequently touched on the links between them, delegations shared policies and best practices to encourage girls and women to do more, earn more and become more than their mothers and grandmothers. Strategies ranged from "low-tech", such as training teachers to keep girls from sitting at the back of the room and to include them in hands-on lessons, to "high-tech", such as harnessing mobile telephony to advance health policy, provide literacy training and extend domestic violence protections.

Others outlined successes in providing early child-care services, which, they argued, greatly contributed to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the spheres of both education and the workforce. A representative of the African Union provided background on a rewards and honours system that aimed to bolster the aspirations of young women scientists and mathematicians across the African continent by providing recognition and financial support directly to individual women and girls.

One speaker stressed that with even minimal support from professional organizations and governmental agencies, women could be as competitive, successful and satisfied in any hard-edged business environment as men. Calling attention to the 14 million women scientists currently at work in her country, China's speaker stressed that their ranks were the result of deliberate preferential policies. Spain's representative highlighted her country's legislative approach to gender parity in the technological and scientific fields, explaining that the aim of its broad approach was to eliminate the kinds of scientific arguments against women's equality that had been used throughout history.

However, several others pointed to persistent gaps, despite such strategies. One speaker requested more information about best practices on incentives offered to institutions of higher learning and scientific organizations to promote gender equality. Others lamented that improvements in the educational sphere were not yet consistently translated into successes in the work place. That meant, in turn, that they also did not translate into women's economic empowerment.

Responding on behalf of the United Nations, Ms. HODGES said the creation of UN Women had galvanized the rest of the United Nations system to increase gender equality. As a number of speakers had already said, women's empowerment drove economic growth and social change, and gave life to the meaning of citizenship. It also led women to gain more from the benefits of international trade. Gender stereotypes and sexual discrimination remained the root causes of segregation in the labour market. Monitoring and managing the reactions of boys to programmes promoting girls' empowerment was critical to ensuring success of those efforts.

She agreed that women's educational gains had not translated into economic progress and entrepreneurial opportunities. Until there was equal sharing of care responsibilities, the barriers to gender equality would continue to hamper the "STEM" fields (science, technology, economics and mathematics). The fact that women earned university degrees but could still not attain equal remuneration — if they could even get a job — was a particular challenge. While she had hoped to hear more information about the school-to-work transition, she appreciated efforts to shore up retention rates in the workplace.

Responding on behalf of non-governmental organizations, Ms. SOOD said "market-relevant" education was too often lacking for adolescent girls. Everyone in the room already knew that youth were clearly engaged in emerging technologies through mobile phones and computers, and

Facebook and Twitter. Those technologies were particularly important for girls because they took them outside themselves. As one teenage African girl had said, the Internet “is for us the way of escaping from a closed society. It is vital to us. It gives us liberty.”

Continuing, she said technology not only gave girls freedoms, but could provide innovative protection mechanisms, as was the case with the software program “Frontline”. Technology also afforded girls entrepreneurial outlets, including, for example, renting out mobile phones to other girls, and it could give them confidence. As for the darker side of technology — in which girls felt a false sense of security when looking at a computer or phone screen — she suggested that Governments and private companies be encouraged to design and implement protective mechanisms. School curriculum could also include technology education, including warnings about the dangers, as a matter of course. She reminded delegations that the topics were not just “girls only” issues.

In closing, Ms. VÁZQUEZ MOTA said today’s event could rightly be termed a forum for freedoms. Having listened to the discussion, she considered the major goal to be providing quality education to girls in science, math and technology. Access to financing and credit were also critical in allowing women to get into and remain in those fields. She celebrated the fact that, as several speakers had said, women were given fellowships and rewards in many of the quantitative fields today.

Also participating in the discussion were ministers and high-level officials from Hungary, Italy, Chile, Croatia, Panama, Slovenia, Ghana, Sweden, United States, Switzerland, Jordan, Israel, Belarus, Syria, Zambia, Kenya, Turkey and Venezuela. Representatives of the European Union and Holy See also contributed.

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\* The 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting was covered in Press Release [WOM/1792](#) of 12 March 2010.