

**Opening Statement**  
**By**  
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**At**  
**The Preparatory Meeting of National Women's Machineries**  
**To Plan the Seventh Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible**  
**for Women's/Gender Affairs**  
**1 March 2003**

**Honourable Ministers**  
**Excellencies, Participants from National Machineries,**  
**Colleagues and Friends,**

Greetings from the United Nations, especially the women of the United Nations.

I am deeply honoured to have this opportunity to be with you today and to participate in the Preparatory Meeting of National Women's Machineries to plan the Seventh Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's/Gender Affairs (WAMM). At the outset, I would like to thank the organizers for their kind invitation and warm hospitality, particularly Nancy Spence, Director of the Social Transformation Programmes Division and her colleagues. I am also happy to see many of you who came to New York to also attend the Commission on the Status of Women at its 47<sup>th</sup> Session for the next two weeks.

Consistent with its fundamental principles and objectives, the Commonwealth has made many contributions to bringing about improvements in the current international political, economic and social climate, including its strong stand on gender issues and support of the United Nations gender equality goals. Both, the Fifth and Sixth Meetings of Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs held in Port of Spain and New Delhi in 1996 and 2000 respectively, were significant contributions to Beijing+5. Over the years, Members of the Commonwealth, as the largest intergovernmental, interregional group, have been playing an active role in the United Nations and particularly in the Commission on the Status of Women and in the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The Commonwealth has led the way on gender mainstreaming (GMS) and gender budgeting methodologies at the national level. Building on your work, the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality is doing gender budgeting at the international level. It is, therefore,

most fitting that your meeting is examining the ways in which the Commonwealth can contribute to the review and appraisal of Beijing+10.

Before discussing the link between Beijing+10 and the Seventh Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's/Gender Affairs on which I have been asked to speak today, I would like to cover the current international development framework in terms of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), then briefly touch on the intergovernmental process of the review of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits and to speak about your possible agenda for WAMM.

The conferences and summits of the 1990s and the follow-up special sessions, saw a collective effort of Governments, civil society and the United Nations bodies to shape their common goals and objectives in development.

These efforts culminated in the historic Millennium Summit 2000 where Heads of State and Government adopted the Millennium Declaration. The Declaration was an attempt to move towards implementation by States. It was also intended to galvanize disparate and sometimes competing development agenda in an effort to produce a powerful political tool to hold governments and international institutions accountable. To do so, its main goals and targets were later refined as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Among the eight MDGs, only Goal 3 specifically calls explicitly for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. However, gender being a cross-cutting issue, is essential for the attainment of all MDGs. In fact, there are specific links between the MDGs and the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2000 Beijing +5 Outcome Document. For example, Goal 1 calling for eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is linked to Critical Areas on women and poverty, and women and economy. Goal 2 calling for the achievement of universal primary education is covered in the Critical Areas dealing with education and training of women and the girl child. Goal 3 relates to all critical areas. Goal 4 relates to the Critical Area on the girl child. Goals 5 and 6 correspond to the Critical Area on women and health. Goal 7 relates to the Critical Area dealing with women and environment and Goal 8 covers all critical areas of the Platform.

The Secretary-General is playing a leading role in building up political support for the implementation of MDGs. Through his agenda for further change to strengthen the United Nations adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/300, he aims at aligning United Nations activities with the priorities defined in the Millennium Declaration and by the global conferences of the 1990s.

The bulk of the work around the MDGs is actually taking place at the country level, including civil society dialogue, local campaigns and the production of MDG country progress reports, (Millennium reports). These reports serve to monitor the implementation of national targets related to the MDGs. Each country will set its own

targets, which will not be imposed. More than 20 countries have already prepared their reports, analysing the country's development context, going through the main goals to identify major challenges faced, what policies and programmes are being put in place to create a supportive environment and what are the priorities for development assistance. It is critical that gender equality becomes an integral part of each country's Millennium reporting for each MDG.

Your own recent focus on Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the MDGs is most timely and I am sure Naila Kabeer's groundbreaking book will be widely read and be a valuable tool for policy makers.

As we approach the 10-year assessment of achievements under the Beijing Platform for Action, we see that some progress has been made in certain areas: education, health and non-discriminatory legislation, the recognition of women's human rights and their essential role in economic and social development and in peace building, has vastly increased as has public acknowledgement that where women achieve equality, the society as a whole benefits.

Despite this progress, other phenomena - the spread of HIV/AIDS and the intersection of famine and drought in Southern Africa, for example, and the spread of conflict situations in the Middle East, in Africa and elsewhere - present new, more serious challenges than before. A few such challenges are:

- (a) Poverty is increasing at an alarming rate. Women and children are the majority of those in poverty.
- (b) The realization of the MDGs related to women's and girls' education has been elusive;
- (c) Violence against women is on the rise: in surveys around the world, 10-69 per cent of women report being physically assaulted by a male partner as evidenced from the 2002 report of WHO "World Report on Violence and Health"; we know as a fact that most violence against women goes unreported;
- (d) Women and children continue to be prime victims of armed conflict as shown in the 2002 Secretary-General's study on women, peace and security prepared in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325;
- (e) The HIV/AIDS pandemic reached catastrophic proportions threatening whole nations especially in Southern Africa with extinction. The number of infected reached 42 million, of these, 38.6 million are adults – 19.4 million men and 19.2 million women. Women are the most affected by this deadly disease: they make up 58% of HIV-positive adults in Sub-Saharan Africa, 55% in North Africa and the Middle East, and 50% in the Caribbean. In the most recent publication by the United Nations Population Division, the demographic forecast for 2050 was scaled down to 8.9 billion from 9.3 billion

estimated two years ago to account for HIV/AIDS deaths and declining birth rates.

These and many other challenges led Member States to the conclusion that an integrated and coordinated implementation and follow up to the major United Nations conferences and summits is needed to review and appraise them.

I turn now to the process itself. The General Assembly, at its 57th session last year, established an open-ended working group to produce concrete recommendations on an integrated and coordinated follow-up of the United Nations conferences and summits, in the economic, social and related fields (57/270). The Working Group is to report to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2003, and decisions are expected from the General Assembly this fall.

The Group intends to make more extensive use of the General Assembly plenary, second and third committees meetings. In particular, it is felt that the identification of common themes of conferences might facilitate a thematic approach to the reviews in the General Assembly and ECOSOC, supplementing the review of individual conferences in the functional commissions such as the Commissions on the Status of Women, on Population and Development and so on. Working in a mutually reinforcing way, the General Assembly, ECOSOC and its functional commissions, it is hoped, would capture some of the special characteristics of the conferences while avoiding a tendency to backtrack on commitments. Nevertheless it is important that where gender equality issues are concerned, we ensure that neither the theme itself nor its cross-cutting aspects are lost or submerged.

As far as a mandate for a 10-year review is concerned, this lies in the Platform and in the Political Declaration of Beijing+5, where Member States decided to “assess regularly further implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action with a view to bringing together all parties involved in 2005 to assess progress and consider new initiatives, as appropriate, ten years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action”...

So what is planned? A 10-year review, propelled by the Commission on the Status of Women and its Bureau, which will probably serve as a Preparatory Committee, requires each Member State to assess progress based on national plans for action on the advancement of women prepared after 1995. The Commonwealth’s updated Plan for Action “Advancing the Commonwealth Agenda into the New Millennium (2000-2005)” is a most welcome model as it refines the focus of the 1995 Plan and addresses persisting and emerging gender equality issues. We also need assessments of progress by national and international NGOs.

I turn now to considering themes for WAMM’s agenda. Actually, all the critical areas of the Beijing Platform are important but greater emphasis could be placed on poverty eradication and economic empowerment of women, women’s participation in decision-making (women account for only 14 per cent in national parliaments); women’s

human rights, violence against women including traffic in women; health and HIV/AIDS, education, the media and information communication technologies (ICTs) and women and peace building.

Second, we also expect to have a regional perspective by organizing a series of regional and thematic meetings, expert group meetings and a review of national reports, on the implementation of national plans and programmes of action at the regional level. New and emerging problems will be identified, as well as pervasive challenges that impede the empowerment and advancement of women.

Beijing+10 should focus on progress made on implementation strategies, mechanisms and best practices. Gender mainstreaming, as a tool for achieving gender equality, should also be reviewed.

The Commonwealth can make a significant contribution to Beijing+10 in the following six strategies:

- (1) Caucusing with members of the Working Group through its Commonwealth Members on how the integrated and coordinated implementation of United Nations conferences and summits could better integrate gender and be linked with the MDGs;
- (2) Calling on its members to examine their national plans and programmes for action with a view to intensifying their implementation; having seminars throughout the Commonwealth countries on gaps in implementation and making outcomes available to the United Nations.
- (3) Identifying new and emerging issues concerning the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming in countries of the Commonwealth;
- (4) Ensuring that all Ministries and Departments have integrated gender equality issues in their plans and targets.
- (5) Calling on its members to cooperate with the United Nations in the context of the review and appraisal; and
- (6) Playing an active role in all aspects relating to the Beijing +10 to review progress.

We must not lose time to start our preparations for the review and appraisal. Beijing+10 offers us a unique opportunity to shape the fate of women over the years to come. Millions of women place confidence in us as they have in the past. Let us not disappoint them. I am confident that, through our joint efforts, we will be able to make great progress during Beijing+10 to achieve our common goal, the equality of women and men.

I hope to see you in the next two weeks at the Round Table on national institutions and the panels. There are over 100 side events including Naila Kabeer's launch of her book, *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals*. I hope that you will participate actively in these events. I wish you well in your deliberations.

Thank you, Madame Moderator.