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Statement by
PRESIDENTIAL COUNSELLOR FOR WOMEN'S EQUITY
Chief of Delegation

(Check against delivery)

approved. This new law made gender equity a guiding principle, transverse to our legislation.

Further, social equity was defined as a pillar of the National Development Plan "Towards a Community State 2003-2006".

The Social Reactivation policy, designed to achieve the objectives of the Plan, was founded on seven social equity tools, with actions which have been the driving force in economic growth, the generation of employment, the struggle against poverty, and they have given priority attention to the most vulnerable sectors of our people, particularly those affected by violence.

The Government is convinced that this is the only way to build a fairer and more democratic society, which will provide woman the place she deserves as a factor in development and social equity.

The desire of the Colombian government to introduce gender mainstreaming to all policies, plans, strategies and actions, was expressed in that National Development Plan, and will be enhanced in 2006-2010 new National Development Plan, in which the Government included a specific chapter on gender equity.

The Colombian State has pursued three strategies towards gender equity:

- Affirmative actions
- Social Reactivation Policy
- Gender mainstreaming strategy

Affirmative actions are developed in favour of women, children, adolescents, young people, ethnic groups and the handicapped, amongst others, through entities specially created to combat different forms of discrimination.

With regard to women, the Executive has adopted the "Women Builders of Peace and Development Policy", affirmative action that focuses on four intervention areas: employment and business development, education and culture, political participation, and prevention of violence against women. The policy has programs and strategies which are articulated with other policies and instances of national and local government; the results have been satisfactory, and our challenge is to continue with them.

The affirmative action policy contains a strategic plan for the period 2006-2010, to promote the defence of women's rights before the justice system in Colombia,

The office of the People's Defender and the Office of the Procurator General have special delegates for women's affairs, and exercise oversight on government actions.

In terms of violence against women, the Colombian State has several entities that protect women's rights, and bring attention to them as victims of many forms of violence. The Prosecution Service and the family welfare agency ICBF provide assistance in the cases of violence against women, through their care centres for family violence victims and the integral care units for the victims of sexual violence. Action is also taken under the national policy for Peace-Building and Family Coexistence "*Haz Paz*".

At the same time, the Government has enhanced the nationwide system created to work for the advancement of woman, the Counselor's Office for Women's Equity. The intention is to enable it to work more efficiently in its new responsibilities, which include the formulation and implementation of affirmative policy for women, and coordination for the process of gender mainstreaming among social, departmental and local government agencies. Work has been done since 2003 to redefine its functions, mission and vision, and the Office will continue in this process of institutional strengthening over the next few years, analyzing the nature, structure and functions of mechanisms for the advancement of woman in other countries.

The Counselor's Office is accountable to the Presidential Administrative Office, and should remain so, in order to reap the benefits of one of the most important structures in the State, and participating in the operating budget and investment budget annually assigned to it, and to have direct contact with all the ministries and other agencies of national and regional administration, international

"National Agreement for Equity between Women and Men" signed on October 14, 2003 in the presence of the President of the Republic, by representatives of the three branches of the public power, public universities, organs of control, and some private-sector associations. This agreement has been used to pursue inter-institutional and inter-sectoral agendas for concertation.

The "National Agreement" has a special meaning in the implementation of UN Resolution 1325, since in addition to making progress in the incorporation of the gender perspective into public policy, it accentuates women's participation on conditions of equality with men, in all spheres of society.

May 28, 2006, with a total of 6,161,817, compared to 5,700,547 men.

We also highlight the increase in women's participation in the public service in 2005, due to the application of the "Quota Law", amongst other factors. In the Executive, there was an increase of 2.57%; in State institutions, 5.53%. 4 out of the 13 Ministries and more than one third of management positions in public administration in regional governments are now occupied by women. In the capital Bogota, the 20 mayoral districts have 20 women mayors.

Women's participation in policy drafting and in non-governmental organizations and associations has been secured by the promotion of:

- Women's Community Encounters, encouraged by the Counselor's Office for Women's Equity; there are 323 of them, in as many municipal districts across the country as a recognition of the diversity and heterogeneity of women in all regions, and giving them their "own voice", for them to demand their rights.

- The meetings of the Women Builders of Peace and Development, with the participation of representations of more than 4000 social and community women's organizations across the nation.

- The Pact for the Effective Inclusion of Women in Politics, signed on October 5,

UNIFEM has been an important ally in all these efforts.

Two women with wide experience in NGO activity, and who work for peace, are now part of the National Commission for Reparations and Conciliation, and one of them is here with us in the Delegation.

Following Article 8, women represent the State at an international level on equal conditions with men: 131 women are engaged in diplomatic posts in the foreign service, and 35 are the heads of their diplomatic missions.

Women have headed the Colombian missions to international organizations. Colombia was recently elected as Vice-president of the Interamerican Commission on Women in the Organization of American States, and this is recognition of the work which the State has been doing in this important area.

In relation to Article 10, differences in access to education between men and women have practically disappeared. Illiteracy among women has fallen; the figures show that at all levels, more men withdraw from the education system than women; in the last 10 years, coverage has increased for the women in primary, secondary and college education.

The present government is materializing a true "educational revolution with a gender perspective ", and the figures confirm this. Today, 49.17% of new school places created for basic and intermediate education have been taken up by women; in higher education, women maintain 51% of the places; and in of the new places available for higher education, 67.8% of the loans of the State educational financing agency ICETEX are benefiting women. The success of the strategies promoted to broaden coverage is reflected in the generation of new places in pre-school, basic and intermediate education.

With regard to Article 11, in the field of employment, the diagnosis of results of the main variables on the level and quality of employment show that conditions are significantly more favorable than they were in 2002. Annual average unemployment at national level fell 3.9 percentage points between December 2002 and December 2005, when it reached 11.8%. By May 2006, unemployment has fallen again, to 11.5%, in contrast to December 2002, when it was 15.1%.

The policies for Social Reactivation, Social Management of the Rural Areas, support for Micro-Enterprise and SMEs, the programs of the Ministry of Social Protection, the National Training Service SENA; the policy of the

Chronic malnutrition has fallen in the same period, although there are marked regional differences, and rural areas are much more strongly affected by these indicators.

In the period 1990-2005, the proportion of pregnancies without any institutional prenatal care has fallen from 20% to 6%. Between 2000-2005, prenatal care provided by doctors increased from 20% to 94%, 83% of pregnant women having four or more prenatal control sessions, and 71% attending their first session when four months pregnant. Institutional coverage of births increased from 86% to 92% in the same period.

The Presidential Counselor's Office for Special Programs (CPPE) acts together with the National Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy produced by the Ministry of Social Protection, in implementing the programme "The Promotion Of Rights And Peace-Building Networks".

The gender perspective has been incorporated into all health sector projects and programs, and information records now have provision for differences between men and women at all stages of the life-cycle, with several successful experiences.

In relation to the participation of rural women in decision-making processes (Article 14), the association of peasant, black and indigenous women ANMUCIC forms part of the Management Board of the agricultural sector development financing agency FINAGRO and of the Management Board of the rural development agency INCODER.

The Government statistical bureau DANE applied the gender perspective in collecting and analyzing several basic products, and included questions in the 2005 Census to obtain a vision of matters related to rural women, inquiring about their occupations, income-earning activities, and general conditions of life.

In the policy "Social Management of Rural Areas" of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, there are programs which involve rural women in the preparation and execution of projects, in particular, the project for the support for development of rural microbusiness, productive alliances, the rural women's microfinancing fund FOMMUR, rural social-interest housing, and the agrarian reform.

The Government has sanctioned Law 771/2002 in favour of rural women, to improve their quality of life, to give priority attention to low-income women and to speed up the achievement of gender equity.

In recent years, my country has received recognition for the progress made in gender equity, respect for human rights and the work performed by the Government in favour of women.

One of our targets for 2006-2010 is to include the gender perspective in our foreign policy and international cooperation agenda, with an emphasis on social development matters.

This progress, which we have achieved in compliance with the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women, is the result of joint work of the Colombian Congress, the Government, the judiciary, and the commitment of other sectors of society. However, the equality of the sexes and the equality and autonomy of women are far from being any reality, and we must recognize that in order to obtain greater and more effective participation by women, and enable them to have a sustained influence on the construction of a fairer and more equitable society, we must redouble our efforts. Colombia is committed to this objective.

Among the challenges which we propose, I should mention:

1. Continuity of the policies mentioned in this Report;
2. Better- quality education, and more articulation with the employment market;
3. Shared responsibility in domestic work;
4. Appropriation of the policy of affirmative action for women in all local government areas;
5. Further enhancement of the national mechanism for women;
6. Reduction in all forms of violence against women;
7. Consolidation of the strategy of gender transversality;
8. Greater participation for women in elected offices.

Finally, I would like to point another matter which confirms our commitment to the Convention the important delegation which has come from Colombia, with the presence of public servants from the highest levels of government.