

**56<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**  
**Ms. Michelle Bachelet**  
**Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Women**

**Closing remarks**  
**15 March 2012**

Madame Chair,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Colleagues and friends,

During this fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we have witnessed passionate and dynamic discussion with a very high level of participation from governments and civil society.

Unfortunately we have also witnessed an inability to reach consensus on the agreed conclusions on our priority theme, empowering rural women. We have come to an impasse, which is deeply regrettable.

This situation is unfortunate and I would like to express disappointment, disappointment that is shared by many women around the world, especially rural women and girls to whom this session was dedicated.

It means a failure to adopt agreed conclusions after two weeks full of energy and commitment of so many official delegations, with many headed by ministers and senior government officials. The 2,084 representatives from 435 civil society organizations brought forth the voices and perceptions of women and their contribution was invaluable.

There were more than 70 side events on the United Nations premises, and more than 300 side events outside of the United Nations. The session was impressive not only in terms of numbers and participation.

These two weeks gave us hope that stakeholders were ready to provide both priority attention and much needed resources to further women's empowerment and gender equality in all its dimensions, including sexual and reproductive health, and access to technology, and other important areas.

During these past two weeks, we have heard many innovations and good practice examples. Fresh and creative ideas were presented about what works and how national policy, legal reforms, programmes and services are

national capacity and national systems on data collection to advance women's empowerment and gender equality.

Madame Chair,  
Distinguished participants,

This session of the Commission on the Status of Women confirmed once again that the empowerment of women cannot be pursued in isolation from current global, regional and national realities. Indeed, economic, political, cultural and social realities provide the context for achieving gender equality as a societal responsibility. The current state of affairs—marked by rising mistrust and frustration with governments and institutions, economic instability, high unemployment, and climate change, actually provides us with a valid argument. We can no longer afford to leave women out.

No solution to today's most pressing challenges can be found without the full and equal participation of women. We cannot achieve democracy, sustainable development and lasting peace unless women obtain the same opportunities as men to influence developments at all levels of society.

The time is now to remove the barriers and discrimination that hold women back from reaching their potential. If we want to end hunger and poverty, then we need to open fiscal and policy space to respond to the rights, needs and priorities of rural women and women farmers. If we want to walk on a path of sustainable development, then we need to open opportunities to ensure that women's rights and empowerment are pursued as a priority. Times of social upheaval and political transformation present opportunities for the full and equal participation of women in decision-making to strengthen democracy and justice for all.

As we look ahead, there is no shortage of work to be done. And I would like to express the hope to move forward in a spirit of safeguarding the consensus that has been reached in international agreements over many years regarding women's rights, as articulated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and other agreements.

Madame Chair,

The focus next year of this Commission will be the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. There can be no peace that is lasting and no development that is sustainable until we end violence against women and girls. The initial discussion that took place during this session, on issues that should be covered next year, was very productive. Now we need to look at the important measures that have been taken over many years, and make a critical analysis of what needs to be done so that we can bring about truly irreversible improvements and action to match the scale and scope of the problem. I urge all stakeholders to take full advantage of the months ahead to gather the evidence, good practices and successful examples for a productive and ground-breaking session in 2013. I would like to assure you that UN-Women is committed to working with all of you on preparing very well for next year's session.