

**Opening statement
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**Expert Group Meeting on “The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and
Violence against the Girl Child”
organized by**

At its 50th session in March this year, the Commission adopted new working methods, which place a stronger emphasis on the implementation of the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference in Beijing and the outcome of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly. In its Declaration, the Commission called for full and accelerated implementation of existing commitments. The Commission will consider the implementation of commitments in relation to one priority theme at its annual sessions, the outcome of which will be policy recommendations (or agreed conclusions) to enhance implementation. The agreed conclusions on the priority theme will be broadly disseminated to governments, the United Nations system, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders.

To facilitate the development of the agreed conclusions, an interactive expert panel will be held on the theme of the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child during the Commission next February. The results of this expert group meeting will be presented during the panel and the report of the meeting will also be widely distributed to delegates at the Commission. The expert group meeting thus provides an extremely important opportunity to make a critical input to the Commissions' agreed conclusions which will provide the global consensus on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.

The issue of the girl child has been firmly placed on the international agenda over the past decade and a half in many important intergovernmental processes in the United Nations. The 1990 Declaration of the World Summit for Children accorded priority attention to the girl child's survival, development and protection. At the Summit, the international community acknowledged that the equal rights of girls and equal participation of women in the social, cultural, economic and political life of societies are a prerequisite for successful and sustainable development. The follow-up to the Summit at the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly in 2002 recognized that the achievement of development goals for children, particularly girls, was contingent upon successful and sustainable development.

In the five-year review of implementation of the Platform for Action at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000, child labour, violence, lack of access to education, and sexual abuse were identified as some of the obstacles that the girl child continues to face.

The report of the Secretary-General on the ten-year review of the Platform for Action in 2005 concluded that progress has been made by many countries in the advancement of the girl child, in particular in the recognition of the human rights of the girl child through the adoption of appropriate legislation, and in increased access to primary education. It noted, however, further efforts were needed to ensure equal access to secondary education and to job opportunities, to eradicate sex work by children, to ensure reintegration of the girl child after armed conflicts, and to improve collection of data on the situation of the girl child.

At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders reaffirmed their previous commitments to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. At its sixtieth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 60/141 on the girl child, in which it expressed deep concern about discrimination against the girl child and the violation of her rights and stressed the importance of a substantive assessment of the implementation of the Platform for Action with a life-cycle perspective.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) contain mutually reinforcing principles which should ensure protection and fulfilment of the rights of girls and end gender-based discrimination. However, as will be emphasized by Professor Savitri Goonesekere later today, it is important that the implementation of the general norms on children as well as the norms on women / gender equality allow for a very specific focus on the rights of the girl child. Despite the existing international legal framework, girls continue to face de jure and de facto inequalities in virtually all societies.

The Study of the Independent Expert on Violence against Children and the Secretary-General's In-depth Study on Violence against Women, which will be presented to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session next month, provide complementary analyses of the problem of gender-based violence, its forms, scope and manifestations across the lifespan, including on the girl child, as well as many recommendations for concrete actions, which emphasize the responsibility of states to eliminate this violence.

The decision of the Commission on the Status of Women to focus on the girl child as its priority theme in 2007 provides an excellent opportunity to assess progress in implementation of the recommendations on eliminating discrimination and violence against the girl child, and to identify strategies to address the remaining challenges. The Expert Group Meeting provides this group of selected experts the opportunity to have a significant impact on this process.

I would encourage you to use the opportunity this meeting provides effectively. Over the coming days, you will share achievements, lessons learned, and good practices, critically examine factors that impede the elimination of all forms of discrimination and

I am sure that there will rightly be a strong focus on protection issues in this meeting. I would like, however, to encourage you to also think creatively about the empowerment of the girl child, including in relation to developing leadership. Empowerment during early adolescence needs particular attention as girls at this stage in their lives may find that their worlds "shrink" significantly. They may be withdrawn school, face increased labour demands from within their families which limits their free time, have less access to their peers and friends, and even be confined to the immediate vicinity of the home or forced into early marriage. They can experience confusion at being "left out" or "left behind", which can have a negative impact on their self-esteem and confidence and thus be very disempowering.

Empowerment requires addressing the often low levels of expectations for girls which are internalized by girls themselves, as well as the lack of opportunities. Education can play a critical role in providing skills and capabilities, opportunities for developing social networks, a safe space for exploring new ideas and for sport and recreation. The fact that schools can, however, also be disempowering spaces for girls, in particular by exposing them to sexual exploitation and abuse, needs to be explicitly recognized and addressed.

Work on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has shown that girls do not have equitable access to this critical resource in homes, schools and community facilities. They risk being left behind in this new arena and losing access to an empowering tool which offers new spaces and opportunities for learning.

Issues of economic empowerment and security also need to be specifically addressed. Girls in rural areas face additional constraints, especially in situations of poverty. The livelihood of girls, particularly in the context of HIV/AIDs, need further explicit attention. Economic disempowerment and insecurity forces many girls to make risky choices, often involving sexual abuse.

Greater attention has to be given to access to decision-making and participation for girls, This requires attention to girls themselves as well as to key actors in their environments. Many girls can be discouraged or even punished for having opinions and trying to make their voices heard. Opportunities for civic participation need to be provided. Older women can play critical roles as mentors and role models.

One of the critical strategies for empowering girls and expanding their opportunities is addressing persistent stereotypical attitudes and behaviours. An important outcome of the 10-year review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was recognition that attitudes and behaviours - of the general public as well as bureaucrats in

The establishment of an enabling environment for girls will be critical for eliminating discrimination and violence against them. The framework developed for promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women – focused on developing **capabilities**, increasing access to **resources and opportunities**, enhancing **agency and leadership**, promoting and protecting **human rights** and ensuring **security** - is equally relevant for the girl child.

The preparatory work done by the Division for the Advancement of Women indicates that one of main challenges today remains the persistent lack of explicit attention to the girl child. Much important work is still done at national level, and by international and regional organizations, including the United Nations, with the assumption that interventions focused generally on children will automatically address the concerns of girls. We in this room know too well from the long history of work on gender equality that there is no such automatic process. We have had to struggle – and continue to struggle - to ensure a specific focus on women – through targeted interventions for women, through the gender mainstreaming strategy, and through a specific human rights treaty. The same efforts are clearly needed to ensure that the needs, priorities and contributions of the girl child are adequately addressed in all areas.

As the introduction to my statement illustrates, we already have many good policy recommendations and human rights standards on the girl child. The Commission on the Status of Women has emphasized the importance of ensuring accelerated implementation of these policies and norms. The focus of the meeting should, therefore, be on identifying:

§ The current critical **issues** in relation to the girl child;

