

Commission on the Status of Women  
Fifty-sixth session  
(27 February – 9 March 2012)

27 February 2012  
10 AM, GA Hall

Statement by the President of the Economic and Social Council  
H.E. Mr. Miloš Koterec, Permanent Representative of Slovakia

Mme. Chair,  
Deputy Secretary-General,  
Under-Secretary-General,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address the opening of the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-sixth session. This Commission not only deals with issues of primary importance to all societies, it is also one of the best-attended events on the annual calendar of this Organization. Indeed, late February / early March is a time of great energy and dynamism here at United Nations Headquarters, when gender equality advocates from Governments, civil society and the United Nations system come together in a common effort and commitment to achieve the goal of gender equality, exchange experience and lessons learned, and to strategize and network on how to move forward this agenda to benefit women and men, girls and boys everywhere.

As you are well aware, the Economic and Social Council is the principal forum in the United Nations for discussing international economic and social development issues, and for sharpening the global policy framework in these areas. The Council greatly benefits from the contributions of all its functional commissions as it performs its key functions.

The Commission on the Status of Women plays a key role in moving forward this agenda. It monitors the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, serves as forum for building consensus, and agrees on new measures and further actions to be taken by Governments and other stakeholders. The Commission also acts as a catalyst for mainstreaming gender perspectives in other intergovernmental processes of the United Nations, including in the work of the Economic and Social Council. The Economic and Social Council and its newly elected Bureau are keenly aware of, and value this critical role of the Commission.

Since 2007, ECOSOC has convened Annual Ministerial Reviews to assess progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals as well as other international commitments made in major United Nations conferences and summits. In this framework, ECOSOC's 2010 Annual Ministerial Review focused on "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women". The resulting Ministerial Declaration recognized, in particular, that implementation gaps in the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women persist, and agreed on a series of strategies across all areas so as to close those gaps.

There will be further opportunities this year, to demonstrate the strong synergies between the work of the Commission on the Status of Women and the high-level segment of ECOSOC. The Commission's focus on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges, is highly relevant to the focus of this year's Annual Ministerial Review on "Promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work to eradicate poverty in the context of inclusive, sustainable and equitable economic growth at all levels for achieving the MDGs". In many respects, rural women face the most significant challenges when it comes to finding and

holding jobs that are productive and decent, and that enable them and their households to break out of poverty and contribute to sustainable and equitable national economic growth.

Rural women constitute one-fourth of the world's population. They are farmers, traders, and entrepreneurs, construction workers and healthcare providers, all of which are essential to the economic fabric of societies. So too is their unpaid domestic and care-related work. They take charge of the maintenance of households and care for family members in contexts which many working age males have left in search of opportunities in urban areas.

Unleashing the potential of rural women will make a major contribution to ending poverty and hunger and achieving sustainable development. It is critical that their contributions are recognized and their voices heard in decision-making processes at all levels of governments and within rural organizations. Participatory approaches, stakeholder consultations, and support for rural and women's organizations can help ensure that rural women's priorities are reflected in macroeconomic policies and rural development and agricultural programmes. The empowerment of rural women demands comprehensive strategies address the many obstacles rural women face. Policy-makers must therefore adopt a systematic approach for the empowerment of rural women and ensure that the broader policy environment is responsive to the rights and needs of rural women and girls.

Distinguished delegates,

I commend the Commission for its consistent effort to evaluate steps taken in follow-up to its previous policy guidance, which increases accountability. Such accountability is essential if we are to close the implementation gap that continues to persist

between commitments made and women's daily realities. In that regard we look forward to the Commission findings as it considers progress in the implementation of its Agreed Conclusions of 2008, on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women is an occasion to solidify consensus on urgent actions needed to make a real difference in the lives of millions of rural women. You have the opportunity to enrich the ECOSOC's deliberations during its Annual Ministerial Review and strengthen the Council's ability to reflect gender perspectives in its work. You also have the opportunity, through your policy recommendations, to send important messages that will strengthen the commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment into other key policy fora, such as the upcoming Rio+20 conference and the preparations for the post-2015 development agenda.

I wish you a productive session, and I thank you.