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## Third Committee

### Summary record of the 9th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 11 October 2010, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Ploder (Vice-Chair) ..... (Austria)

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*In the absence of Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Chair; Ms. Ploder (Austria), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

**Agenda item 28: Advancement of women (continued)**  
(A/65/336)

**(a) Advancement of women (continued)** (A/65/38, A/65/208, A/65/209, A/65/218, A/65/268 and A/65/334)

**(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (continued)** (A/65/204 and A/C.3/65/L.7)

1. **Mr. Al-Shami** (Yemen), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that 2010 was a significant year for women, marking the fifteenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption by the General Assembly of a landmark resolution establishing the new United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The 2010 High-level Segment of the Economic and Social Council had also been devoted to matters of gender equality and women's empowerment.

2. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, much had been achieved. Access to education for girls had increased and gains had been made in women's health. Member States had taken a variety of measures to prevent and address violence against women, and recognition of the impact of armed conflict on women and their contributions to peace processes and peacebuilding had increased significantly. Women's access to employment opportunities had improved, their participation in public and political life had increased in all regions and there was greater emphasis on gender equality, the empowerment of women and the realization of women's human rights.

3. However, two thirds of illiterate adults were women, women's health continued to face challenges and violence against women persisted worldwide. Women's access to labour markets and decent work remained limited, they were underrepresented at senior decision-making levels, and national mechanisms for gender equality still suffered from inadequate human and financial resources. Women were disproportionately

affected by the financial, economic, food and energy crises.

4. The Group of 77 and China attached great importance to the fundamental principles of universality, national ownership and equitable geographical representation in the creation of the new gender entity, and the establishment of a new Executive Board which was strong, independent, well-funded and based on equitable geographical distribution.

5. The Group of 77 and China pledged its full support to the operationalization of UN Women and welcomed the appointment of Ms. Michelle Bachelet, a woman from the South, as its first head. It trusted that the integration of the mandate of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) into UN Women would lead to training and research work of greater impact, which would be generously supported and efficiently managed, and that training and research would continue to be carried out at the facility in the Dominican Republic.

6. The Group of 77 and China expressed its deep concern about the suffering of women and girls living under foreign occupation and emphasized the urgent need to respect international law. It welcomed the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons and the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health.

7. **Mr. Burniat** (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process countries and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia; and, in addition, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the European Union had for many years supported the reform of United Nations gender architecture and was very pleased at the establishment of UN Women, which was expected to close the gap between the normative and operational work of the United Nations in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women, to foster system-wide mainstreaming and strengthen the accountability of the United Nations system. The new body would strengthen the ability of the United Nations to meet urgent and increasing requests from Governments

related to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

8. The European Union reaffirmed its strong commitment to full implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action adopted at the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development, as well as to the key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action agreed at the Five-Year Review and Appraisal of the Conference and in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.

9. Gender equality could not be achieved unless women's sexual and reproductive health and rights were guaranteed. Expanding access to sexual and reproductive health information and services was essential for achieving the Beijing Platform for Action, the Cairo Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals. The European Union also supported United Nations programmes and actions against female genital mutilation.

10. The establishment of the Human Rights Council Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and Practice, which would assist Member States in implementing their commitments in that area, was welcomed.

11. The European Commission had adopted a Women's Charter in early 2010. Its five areas (equal economic independence; equal pay for equal work and work of equal value; equality in decision-making, dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence; and the promotion of gender equality beyond Europe) had been translated into a new strategy for gender equality that had been adopted in September 2010.

12. Sexual violence in conflict situations was an expanding scourge. While men were also victims of sexual violence, women were by far the main target. No effort should be spared to prevent it, protect the victims and prosecute the perpetrators, as well as to involve men in prevention. All States which had not yet done so were urged to sign and ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which clearly classified the violation of women's human rights in wartime as a crime against humanity.

13. The European Union was also looking into establishing a comprehensive strategy to increase the scale and effectiveness of commitments to combat violence against women within the European Union, to

be supported by an awareness-raising campaign. To prepare for the strategy, two studies had been launched: one on standardization of national legislation on gender violence and violence against children, and one on harmful traditional practices in the European Union, including honour crimes and female genital mutilation.

14. The European Union had recently adopted a Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development 2010-2015 as part of its strategy to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Its main objective was to accelerate the achievement of the Goals, especially those having to do with gender equality and maternal health, and to attain the goals set out by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Cairo Programme of Action. The Plan of Action would systematically include gender equality in political and policy dialogues with partner countries to raise awareness and encourage action. It aimed to make aid more effective and transparent by ensuring that gender equality issues were part of the annual and multiannual planning process with partner countries and by systematically applying internationally accepted standards to track aid devoted to that end.

15. Through the Plan of Action on Gender Equality, the European Union intended to support partner countries in fully implementing Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security. Fostering gender equality and women's empowerment was crucial for achieving peace and security. Sustained support for the protection of women in armed conflict and women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction was necessary.

16. The European Union had adopted a comprehensive set of indicators on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security designed to complement the indicators proposed by the Secretary-General. The European Union welcomed the initiative by the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security to request all Governments to present concrete commitments at the ministerial open debate in the Security Council in late October, to mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the resolution.

17. Despite progress over the past ten years, the participation of women in peacebuilding remained marginal and the protection of women in conflict was

insufficient, as demonstrated by instances of savage violence. Increased political participation in peacemaking and post-conflict activities was crucial, as was the economic participation of women during recovery.

18. **Mr. Talbot** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the countries of the region had been concentrating on the elimination of gender-based violence and poverty and social exclusion, particularly as they pertained to women, combating and mainstreaming a gender perspective into HIV/AIDS programmes, ensuring the preparation of women for leadership and decision-making positions and education and training of women and girls.

19. Under a cooperation agreement between CARICOM and Spain, a project was being implemented aimed at improving research, advocacy, public education and policy development to eliminate gender-based violence in member States. For the first time, a CARICOM Advocate for Gender Justice had been appointed in 2010, and a working group of experts had developed a standardized court-based batterer intervention programme for the region. To date, the programme had been introduced in Grenada, Jamaica, St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago.

20. CARICOM welcomed the United Nations Plan of Action on Trafficking in Persons. CARICOM members would continue to work to ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes were brought to justice and that victims were protected and assisted.

21. CARICOM supported initiatives to address violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations. It expressed its concern at the recent mass rape of more than 300 civilians by rebels in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and welcomed measures taken to apprehend the suspects. Security in the region must be strengthened as a matter of urgency.

22. Entrenched attitudes, practices and negative stereotypes made it difficult for women to achieve empowerment. Women must be positively portrayed in the media, and men and boys must be engaged in gender equality issues. Traditions, cultural and social norms and attitudes which perpetuated discriminatory practices and beliefs must be eliminated.

23. Studies had indicated that unemployed or underemployed women were at greater risk of

exploitation and abuse and much more likely to experience human rights violations. CARICOM agreed with the analysis of the Secretary-General that policy design must address specific measures to achieve women's economic empowerment.

24. CARICOM was delighted at the election in May 2010 of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the first female head of Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the fourth in the region overall. CARICOM States were close to or had already attained the target endorsed by the Economic and Social Council of 30 per cent of positions at decision-making levels filled by women. As many CARICOM States did not have a quota system with regard to the political participation of women, various strategies had been employed to improve women's participation in leadership and decision-making.

25. According to the UNAIDS AIDS Epidemic Update 2009, the rate of new HIV infections had stabilized, treatment coverage had substantially increased and mother-to-child transmission had been reduced. However, women accounted for about half of all the infections in the region, and adolescent and young women recorded higher rates of prevalence than did their male counterparts. Elimination of stigma and discrimination against persons living with HIV was a CARICOM priority, and Governments across the region were developing or had already developed more gender-sensitive approaches to addressing HIV/AIDS.

26. CARICOM welcomed the establishment of UN Women. It noted the marginal increase in the percentage of women in the Professional and higher categories within the United Nations system.

27. The issue of non-communicable diseases was often overlooked, despite the fact that the costs associated with treating them and their complications could push entire households into poverty. Such illnesses took a particular toll on the future prospects of women and girls, who traditionally cared for the sick. In addition, women were disproportionately affected by non-communicable diseases. To address the epidemic, CARICOM had spearheaded an initiative to convene a high-level meeting on prevention and control of non-communicable diseases in 2011.

28. CARICOM member State Haiti had been devastated by an earthquake early in 2010. Only 30 per cent of the funds pledged for reconstruction efforts had been received, and over 1 million Haitians were still

living in temporary shelter. States were urged to continue to fulfil their pledges and commitments. CARICOM recalled the outstanding contributions made to gender equality by activists such as Magalie Marcelin, Anne-Marie Coriolan, Myrna Narcisse and Myriam Merlet, all of whom had perished in the disaster.

29. **Mr. Errazuriz** (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the Rio Group was deeply committed to gender equality, women's empowerment and respect for all women's human rights and fundamental freedoms. Its members had taken steps to improve their legal and regulatory frameworks by means of gender equality laws. It welcomed the establishment of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, to be known as UN Women, and was sure that the leadership of former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet would build capacity to achieve gender equality. It also trusted that once INSTRAW was integrated into UN Women, its activities would continue to be based in the Dominican Republic.

30. The Rio Group called for stronger international dialogue and cooperation to tackle the needs of women and girls amid the current financial and other crises. During a United Nations-organized conference in 2010, the Brasilia Consensus had been adopted, calling for economic empowerment, workplace equality and political participation for women, an end to violence against them and free legal aid to women suffering from violence.

31. The Rio Group was committed to combating trafficking in persons and to protecting its victims, especially women and children. It called for priority to be given to eradicating hunger and poverty and welcomed the adoption by the Commission on the Status of Women of resolution 54/4 on women's economic empowerment. The Group welcomed the establishment by the Human Rights Council of a Working Group of Experts on Discrimination Against Women in Law and Practice and called for increased efforts to eliminate barriers to the empowerment of rural, indigenous and migrant women.

32. **Ms. Karim** (Malawi) speaking on behalf of the African Group, cited African initiatives on women's rights such as the Protocol to the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa of 2005, a basis for holding governments

accountable for advancing the status of women. Some successes were evident for women in Africa, for instance increased employment opportunities, but change had been slow.

33. In line with its efforts to empower women, the African Union (AU) had declared 2010-2020 the African Women's Decade, with the objective of reinvigorating commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. Special focus would be placed on, inter alia, combating poverty, promoting women's entrepreneurship, food security, maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS, science and technology, climate change, peace and security, violence against women and gender budgeting. The AU Assembly had also announced the establishment of the African Fund for Women, to support regional initiatives for women.

34. The African Group welcomed the launch of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons and its Member States pledged to cooperate against those crimes. It also applauded the creation of UN Women and the appointment of Ms. Bachelet to lead it and hoped that adequate and predictable resources would be available to the new entity.

35. Speaking in her national capacity, she said that major strides had been made towards ending obstetric fistula in Malawi. A 12-bed hospital had been established in September 2010 through collaboration between the Government and a philanthropist from Scotland. The Government had also shortened the training period for midwives from four years to one year. The trained midwives would be posted to rural areas to overcome the severe shortage of skilled health workers, which was expected to further reduce Malawi's maternal mortality rate.

36. **Mr. Sefue** (United Republic of Tanzania), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that all SADC members were committed to promoting gender equality and equity, because they recognized that the empowerment of women and full respect for women's rights were essential for the economic and social development of their countries. Accordingly, they had signed and ratified the corresponding regional and international instruments and continued to implement the Beijing Platform of Action and the follow-up actions. Nevertheless, the gap between commitment and implementation remained a major concern and

contradictions existed between customary and national laws and international commitments.

37. The Community was concerned that, at the current level of efforts, most developing countries would be unable to achieve some of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly those relating to child mortality, maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases. In that regard, SADC had developed a regional sexual reproductive health strategy. Furthermore, it welcomed the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health; each year many women died or were incapacitated as a result of obstetric fistula, and the programme should seek to end that problem.

38. Attainment of gender equality and the empowerment of women required a strong gender architecture at the national and the international levels. SADC commended the United Nations on the establishment of the corresponding body, which should have a strong presence in the field and complement the efforts of national Governments and regional gender units. It also praised the work of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in the field and supported the recommendations of its Consultative Committee as presented in the corresponding report of the Secretary-General (A/65/218).

39. The SADC member States were fully committed to ending violence against women and were developing or had established national action plans to achieve that goal. The 2008 SADC Gender Protocol gave new impetus to those efforts because it specified measures that the Governments must take to end such violence.

40. **Ms. van Peski** (Netherlands) said that women in the Netherlands were delighted with the establishment of UN Women — in particular the role of women's groups in it — but that women in other countries had even more to gain. She had met women's leaders in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo who had suffered sexual violence and its consequences, such as HIV infection. They had formed non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to improve conditions in their communities but could achieve much more with greater international support.

41. It was therefore on their behalf, too, that she called on the United Nations to fully implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, which had reaffirmed women's important role in conflict prevention, peace

negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction and had called for women and girls to be protected from gender-based violence. Women rarely sat at peacemaking and reconstruction round tables and were seriously underrepresented in decision-making and public office, preventing them from achieving their full potential in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Their role in redefining political priorities and advancing gender-specific concerns like maternal health deserved the Member States' most concerted efforts.

42. She therefore called on them to promote legal, institutional and electoral systems enabling women to vote and hold public office; to support women's organizations which contributed to peace and democracy; to mainstream gender; to encourage the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in fragile States; and to promote early warning systems by which women could help prevent the outbreak of conflict.

43. **Mr. Vigny** (Switzerland) said that empowerment of women was essential in preventing the violation of their rights. Switzerland believed that the rights guaranteed by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women deserved greater attention and Governments must make them economic and social development priorities. The creation of UN Women would enable speedier progress in that regard.

44. Switzerland saw the recommendation on the importance of prevention contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women as crucial. For example, while many African States had taken steps to prevent female genital mutilation, destination countries for migration had been much less active. Switzerland was currently establishing a legal norm prohibiting the practice and was focusing on prevention, awareness-raising and education. Moreover, since 2003 a Swiss domestic violence prevention unit had been working to eliminate violence between cohabiting and separated couples.

45. With regard to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on the subject, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General on sexual violence in conflict had recently visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where recent sexual violence

against women put that new mandate to the test. Switzerland welcomed the focus on the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls and the Justice Rapid Response Mechanism, a multilateral facility for deploying criminal justice professionals. It had also updated its national action plan for implementing the resolution and was ready to share best practices.

46. The pace of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals greatly depended on respect for basic human rights. Switzerland believed factors contributing to high maternal mortality — such as unwanted pregnancies, restricted family planning, unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted diseases — often had their roots in structural violence against women.

47. **Ms. Stefan** (Liechtenstein), as a victim of domestic violence herself, called on Member States to honour their commitments and implement the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly to end impunity for gender-based violence. Such violence not only affected the physical and mental health of women and violated their human rights, it also had wider implications for the economic and social development of Member States. She highlighted the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo and said that efforts to strengthen the national judicial system must be redoubled.

48. She called for an action-oriented resolution to be adopted to end impunity for gender-based violence by emphasizing the role of the International Criminal Court and the need to implement fully the women, peace and security agenda and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Importance should also be given to education, training and information for justice officials and professionals in order to prevent, investigate and prosecute all forms of gender-based violence.

49. **Ms. Gendi** (Egypt) said that her delegation welcomed the efforts which had culminated in the establishment of UN Women and hoped that geographical balance would be taken into account when recruiting staff to the new entity and that the necessary funding would be forthcoming.

50. Given the difficulties encountered in formulating the indicators to be used to track the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in post-conflict situations, those indicators needed to be analysed and adopted by the General Assembly, not just the Security

Council, in order to be used by Member States and United Nations bodies as a common basis for reporting.

51. In Egypt, a campaign to raise awareness of the dangers women faced in armed conflict situations had been led by the Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement and an international forum to enforce resolution 1325 (2000) had been organized. The Government had also taken steps to improve gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women by providing necessary education and health services for women and girls, particularly in rural areas, and increasing the number of parliamentary seats allocated to women, which reflected public recognition of a need for societal change to increase women's involvement in politics.

52. A comprehensive law to combat trafficking in persons had been adopted in June 2010 and a special fund to assist victims would soon be in place. Other programmes and policies introduced to empower women included an initiative to encourage girls to remain in school. In line with the gender budgeting initiative, women's issues received a separate budget allocation. The Government also encouraged gender parity in high-level political positions, signalling a change in mentality. With regard to economic empowerment, the social fund for development had provided interest-free micro-loans to female heads of households to improve their standards of living.

53. The two Non-Aligned Movement First Ladies Summits held in 2009 had provided opportunities to share best practices to improve gender equality and to identify measures to support rural women. A specialized body for women's affairs and advancement within the framework of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and an office for the advancement of women for African and Arab States of the Non-Aligned Movement would be established in Egypt, which was also the location of the headquarters of the Arab Women's Organization.

54. The Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement had played an important role in empowering women and promoting women's participation in society, as well as being the first women's initiative for peace in the Middle East. The Movement worked with various civil society and non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies.

55. **Mr. Gang** (China) said that the Beijing Declaration, adopted 15 years previously, and its resulting Platform for Action, had marked a milestone in international efforts to promote the development of women. Reviewing efforts by the international community to continue the processes launched in Beijing, including, in particular, mainstreaming the issues of women's health and gender equality among the Millennium Development Goals, he noted that problems of gender discrimination and domestic violence against women remained acute and that the world was still a long way from achieving full gender equality.

56. Accordingly, China called on all countries to implement to the full the Beijing Declaration and to step up their efforts to achieve the women-related Millennium Development Goals. In that context, it welcomed the creation of UN Women as the new overarching women's agency under the United Nations and actively supported its work, hoping that it would be guided by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and staffed in keeping with the principles of equitable geographical distribution and equal representation of men and women. He also stressed that, in developing its activities at the national level, UN Women should take due account of each country's specific circumstances.

57. Turning to his own country, which was home to one fifth of the world's women, he outlined efforts being made to improve their situation, in particular that of women who had migrated from the country to the city and of poor urban women in general. Legislative measures had been adopted to improve the situation of women in China, which currently numbered eight women among its top leaders. Pointing out that China was still a developing country, contending with lingering feudal attitudes, he conceded that much work remained to be done to ensure the full equality of men and women in its society and, to that end, pledged its readiness to work with all countries to enhance the status of women and to ensure full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

58. **Mr. Al Nsour** (Jordan) said that his country attached great importance to the issue of the empowerment of women. In that regard, the withdrawal by his Government of some reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was a significant development, as was the reform of election laws to

double the number of seats women held in Parliament. Jordan would continue to review all its legal, economic and political frameworks in order to further empower women to make independent decisions, while respecting its own social and cultural specificities.

59. A number of provisions of the personal status code had recently been amended, granting women additional rights, including the right to divorce without compromising their economic rights, in addition to raising the age of consent for marriage to 18 years. Turning to the issue of protection of children, he noted that a new law had granted women additional parental custody rights, and his Government had also adopted measures to combat human trafficking, including the establishment of a committee for that purpose.

60. In the context of measures to protect female victims of violence, a recently established centre for female victims of violence provided support, protection and comprehensive care, and a hotline had been set up to facilitate reporting of cases of violence.

61. As to so-called "crimes of honour", the incidence of which was nevertheless rather limited, a criminal court had been established to deal specifically with such crimes and imposed harsh sentences on the perpetrators.

62. The creation of the UN Women was a welcome development that would surely facilitate significant Organization-wide progress towards the empowerment of women. In that regard, he hailed the appointment of former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet to head the entity.

63. Lastly, he reiterated his country's concern at humanitarian tragedies that had a particular impact on women and children. Women's empowerment would entail the complete liberation of women from all forms of violence, especially occupation. In that connection, he hoped that UN Women would address the situation of women living under occupation.

64. **Ms. Abdelrahman** (Sudan) said that her country had made great strides towards improving the situation of women, as it considered them integral partners in development. Women had assumed a number of high-level positions in all areas of society. Furthermore, the Interim National Constitution guaranteed gender equality in terms of social, economic and political rights, and women's life expectancy had matched that of men since 2003.

65. Twenty-eight per cent of seats in Parliament were currently held by women, in accordance with the



election law passed in 2008. Such reforms had resulted from the efforts of Sudanese women activists and civil society, which had long worked to change the stereotypical image of women in society and to increase their civic and political participation. For a number of decades, women in Sudan had had the right to vote and stand for public office, and the number of women in elected positions had increased significantly in recent years.

66. A national plan to combat gender-based violence had been adopted in 2005, along with a unit to combat violence against women and girls under the Ministry of Justice.

67. A national strategy to eradicate genital mutilation of girls had been put in place in 2008, and the Special Prosecutor had issued an official decree calling for increased support for and protection of victims of gender-based violence resulting from the outbreak of the conflict in Darfur. Moreover, recent amendments to a 1991 criminal law had inserted a provision on crimes against humanity and war crimes, and the law's provision on rape and fornication had been revised. A number of official publications addressed the need to combat impunity of Government officials who had committed crimes against humanity and against women in particular. Government bodies were also working in cooperation with UNFPA and the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) to raise public awareness of the issue of violence against women in the Darfur region and nationwide, and to provide care to victims. In coordination with UNMIS and the Sudanese Ministry of Health, a protocol signed with the World Health Organization (WHO) had been revised to assist rape victims and facilitate the payout of compensation due them.

68. As Sudanese women made a major contribution to the rural economy, her Government had taken measures to promote their economic empowerment, including financial support for small business projects undertaken by women in rural areas.

69. The national education policy adopted in 2007 had brought about an increase in enrolment of girls in primary and secondary schools. With regard to reproductive health, in 2008 prenatal care had been provided to 43 per cent of pregnant women, amounting to a twenty-point increase in the provision of such services over the previous year.

70. Welcoming the selection of Michelle Bachelet as head of UN Women, she expressed the hope that the new entity would play an active role in coordinating

work towards empowerment of women and gender equality system-wide, particularly in the midst of the global economic crises and environmental degradation. Given the potential for such situations to impede women in achieving full equality and enjoyment of their rights, her delegation reiterated its rejection of economic sanctions and embargoes as policies that constituted violation of the rights of women and societies. It called for debt cancellation for developing countries, especially the least developed countries, and the lifting of trade restrictions in order to allow those countries to meet commitments undertaken with regard to women's rights.

71. It was also necessary to address the situation of women living under occupation in Palestine, the Golan Heights and occupied Arab territories in Lebanon, and the outrageous violations of women's rights and dignity resulting from such occupation.

72. **Mr. Heller** (Mexico) said that much remained to be done to ensure that women could participate effectively in all areas of society and exercise their rights without being subject to discrimination or violence. The new UN Women would play a central role in meeting the expectations of women worldwide; coordinating different United Nations agencies, funds and programmes; mainstreaming a gender perspective in United Nations activities; and developing strategic alliances and cooperating with Member States. As the economic and social development of women was a high priority for his Government, Mexico would support the new entity in international forums and through voluntary contributions.

73. Following the recommendations and decisions of international bodies, the Government of Mexico had adopted the General Act on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence and established the National Commission for the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women. The General Act on Equality between Women and Men and the Act to Prevent and Punish Human Trafficking had also been adopted and efforts were being made to harmonize the legislation of the 31 Mexican states.

74. One of the most serious challenges facing women and girls worldwide was the problem of sexual violence against women and children in situations of armed conflict. Although they were the main victims of such violence, women and children could be agents for change in their communities and promote national reconciliation. The various United Nations organs should ensure that effective mechanisms and tools were

in place to ensure women and children's participation in resolving conflicts, as well as preventing acts of violence and assisting victims, in order to create more stable, prosperous and democratic societies.

75. **Ms. Astiasarán Arias** (Cuba) said that the increase in the feminization of poverty worldwide remained a cause for serious concern in spite of the progress achieved in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The main obstacles to meeting the objectives of those instruments and the Millennium Development Goals included the reduction of official development assistance, the large increase in foreign debt, the negative impact of climate change and the current international crises.

76. Addressing those inequalities would require putting an end to inflation, the imbalance in the exploitation of natural resources and irrational military expenditures. The international monetary system must be replaced and the foreign debt of the countries of the South cancelled.

77. The elimination of violence against women also required the elimination of unilateral coercive measures. In that respect, the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed unilaterally on Cuba by the United States Government for over half a century constituted an act of genocide and was the main form of violence from which Cuban women and girls suffered. She also denounced the suffering of the mothers, wives and children of five Cubans who had been serving unjust and arbitrary sentences in the United States for 12 years for denouncing the criminal acts of terrorist groups that operated from United States soil against Cuba. Moreover, her Government called on the Government of the United States to issue immediately a humanitarian visa to enable Adriana Pérez and Olga Salanueva, the wives of two of the five detainees, to visit their husbands.

78. Cuba had been working for gender equality and women's empowerment well before the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and had been the first to sign and ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Moreover, women currently held more than 40 per cent of the seats in Cuba's Parliament and were widely represented at all levels of education and in the workplace and the justice system. Cuba welcomed the creation of UN Women and hoped that it would

develop mechanisms to follow up on the commitments of the Beijing Conference.

79. **Mr. Valero Briceño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that contrary to the capitalist notion that women's housework had no value because it was unproductive in terms of capital, his Government recognized domestic work as a source of wealth and welfare. No other constitution in the world had thus acknowledged women's role in history, and, in so doing, taken a stand against their oppression.

80. The defence of the rights of women, along with the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, were essential components of public policy in his country, as evinced by the fact that four of the five public powers were headed by women. In order to overcome existing inequities, institutions such as the Ministry of People's Power for Women and Gender Equality and the National Women's Institute implemented innovative programmes. Furthermore, social missions carried out by the Government, through their work on health, education, food security and other areas, had helped reduce poverty rates and improved the socio-economic welfare of the population. The Madres del Barrio mission, in particular, was providing social protection to mothers and housewives in extreme poverty and promoting the creation of grassroots women's organizations.

81. To combat violence against women, which constituted the most brutal face of discrimination against them, the Bolivarian Government had enacted a number of innovative laws that enshrined their right to a life free from violence. With regard to trafficking of women, his country took a comprehensive approach that addressed the causes by creating the conditions for lifting women out of poverty. Venezuela emphasized the need for international cooperation to tackle the trafficking of women, taking into account the shared responsibility for that problem.

82. In closing, he expressed confidence that the designation of Michelle Bachelet, a woman from Latin America, as the head of the newly created gender entity, UN Women, would contribute to improving the status of women around the world.

83. **Ms. Alhajeri** (Bahrain) said that her country hoped that the welcome appointment of Michelle Bachelet as head of UN Women would hasten progress towards meeting women's needs worldwide, given that the Millennium Development Goals, and sustainable development more broadly, could not be achieved if women did not take on a pivotal role.

84. Out of its conviction that women's participation in all areas of society was key, Bahrain had made the empowerment of women a top priority, and Government policy accorded particular attention to supporting women as full partners in social, political and economic processes. Over the previous decade, women had made unprecedented strides in political life, with increasing numbers of women standing for office at the municipal and parliamentary levels.

85. A national strategy for women's advancement had been put in place, one of its goals being to raise women's awareness of their political rights and to facilitate their participation in decision-making. Since its establishment, the Supreme Council for Women had become the foremost authority on women's issues in Bahrain, having put in place national plans and policies aimed at improving the situation of Bahraini women. In that connection, the Council had launched a national strategy for the advancement of women, in addition to undertaking efforts to preserve the family unit.

86. Turning to education, she noted that the percentage of women enrolled in university had surpassed that of men by a significant margin as a result of ongoing Government efforts to achieve gender equality at all levels of education. Furthermore, women's participation in the economic and political spheres had also increased.

87. With respect to economic empowerment, her Government had undertaken a number of relevant programmes that provided financial support to women, in cooperation with the Supreme Council for Women, which was currently studying a microcredit financing programme.

88. Bahrain fully supported the efforts of all countries to work towards women's advancement and, for its part, would pursue its own endeavours in that regard.

89. **Ms. Kursh** (Israel) said that her country had long been active in the field of women's rights and gender-related aspects of development and had high hopes that the merging of the four principal gender-focused United Nations bodies would result in more effective actions.

90. The past decade had seen several resolutions and studies on gender and sexual violence during conflict and Israel supported the inclusion of an increased gender perspective in peacekeeping operations and peace processes. Recent events had shown that more robust peacekeeping mandates alone did not

necessarily lead to genuine increased protection for women; greater efforts were needed.

91. Israel offered its collaboration in order to build on the consensus for action achieved in Beijing. Having progressed from underdevelopment to development in just over 50 years, Israel felt that it should share the experience it had gained with others. For example, its International Training Centre had been engaged in activities in the socio-economic sphere with an emphasis on gender equality since its inception in the 1960s. Every two years the Centre held an international conference on gender issues related to the interaction between development and conflict for women leaders in order to recommend strategies for shaping the future of their societies. The theme of the most recent conference, held in cooperation with the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, was the implications of the global financial crisis for women. The next event would explore ways to advance the participation of girls and women in science and technology.

92. The current situation of women revealed how much remained to be done. Most of the one billion people living in poverty in the developing world were women; around half a million women and girls died every year due to complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, and nearly 16 million women were living with HIV. Many of those situations were the result of deliberate decisions of States, communities and families, which failed to give priority to the needs of women, or of overtly oppressive policies and practices; both constituted expressions of discrimination and subjugation.

93. **Mr. de Séllos** (Brazil) said that important strides had been made towards gender equality and the empowerment of women since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The year 2010 had been auspicious for women and girls, both worldwide and in his region, where Brazil had hosted the eleventh Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. The outcome document, the Brasilia Consensus, provided a valuable blueprint for addressing the challenges that women in the region still faced.

94. Brazil had achieved almost all of the Millennium Development Goals well in advance of the deadline by means of a set of integrated national policies, including the Bolsa Família, a cash transfer programme that provided monthly subsidies to millions of poor families. The fact that the subsidy was granted to

women and mothers ensured that it would be spent on the acquisition of essential goods, thereby empowering women and guaranteeing that children attended school and received adequate medical care.

95. His country had also achieved gender equality in education; Brazilian girls had, in general, more positive indicators than boys in terms of school access and retention rates, and the presence of women and girls was increasing at all levels of education.

96. Aware of the importance of overcoming gender stereotypes in the effort to achieve gender equality, his Government had launched a programme aimed at training school teachers and principals on how to tackle such stereotypes in the classroom.

97. Brazil's reduction in maternal mortality, while impressive, was not enough to meet the benchmark set in Goal 5; his Government was therefore redoubling its efforts in regions where the problem was more acute. As the reduction of maternal mortality was linked to poverty eradication and full access to sexual and reproductive health care, Brazil attached particular importance to family planning policy, as evinced by the widespread availability of contraceptives and ongoing efforts to improve access to female condoms.

98. Despite significant advances, women in Brazil still faced formidable challenges, including underrepresentation in political and economic decision-making and wage disparity. Noting that similar challenges were faced by women worldwide, he pointed out that UN Women would need to establish a strong presence on the ground and secure adequate financial resources in order to carry out its mission of supporting national efforts towards gender equality.

*The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.*