

10 November 2006



Secretary-General

SG/SM/10727

WOM/1587

United Nations

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

IN SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY REMARKS, SECRETARY-GENERAL COMMENDS

PROGRESS BROUGHT ABOUT BY COMMISSION ON STATUS OF WOMEN

This is the text of remarks by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan today at a round table to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Commission on the Status of Women:

I am moved to be with you today to celebrate this milestone.

Over the past 60 years, the Commission on the Status of Women has played a critical role in shaping the progress of women at both the global and national levels. You have helped develop legal measures. You have shaped new policy. You have raised awareness of the challenges confronting women worldwide.

Back in 1979, you paved the way for the General Assembly to adopt the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, or CEDAW. It was a landmark treaty. The Convention has now been ratified by 185 countries, and has become a crucial tool in the struggle to improve conditions for women everywhere.

In 2000, you laid the groundwork for adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which was a wonderful achievement in its own right. Women in more than 80 countries can now use the Protocol to seek remedies for violations of their rights.

And, in the course of four world conferences on women, you have played a pivotal role -- both in the preparation and in the follow-up. From Mexico to Copenhagen, from Nairobi to Beijing, you helped generate the momentum for change that imbued those conferences. And, equally important, you have helped keep the momentum going since then.

Since Beijing, the Commission has been a catalyst in bringing the perspectives of women into the work of the United Nations as a whole, and into processes at the national level.

You have played a critical role in raising awareness of the impact of major global trends affecting women, from globalization to migration, from human trafficking to HIV/AIDS.

Working in partnership with civil society organizations around the world, you have provided a forum for women to meet, to share experiences and to create and sustain the networks that are so essential to achieve change.

You have demonstrated, time and again, that the Commission not only moves with the times: it is ahead of its time.

Largely thanks to your work, the international community as a whole is beginning to understand a fundamental principle: women are every bit as affected as any man by the challenges facing humanity in the twenty-first century. In many ways, they are even more affected. It is, therefore, right and indeed necessary that women should be engaged in the decision-making processes in all areas, with equal strength and in equal numbers.

The world is also starting to grasp that there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women and girls. Study after study has taught us that no other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, or to reduce infant and maternal mortality. No other policy is as sure to improve nutrition and promote health -- including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation.

World leaders gave voice to those principles at the 2005 World Summit. As they declared in the Outcome document: "Progress for women is progress for all".

We now also look to you to join forces with those newer bodies created as a result of the World Summit: the Human Rights Council; the Peacebuilding Commission; the Democracy Fund; and others.

Women have an absolutely crucial role to play in reinvigorating our human rights machinery, in managing the difficult transition from war to peace, in strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring that all people can exercise their democratic rights. Your leadership can help make the voices and needs of women heard in all those areas.

I also hope you will play an engaged and supportive role as the United Nations works to strengthen and consolidate its gender architecture -- drawing on the recommendations presented yesterday by the High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence.

This will be the last time I address you as Secretary-General of the United Nations. But it will not be the end of my fight for the empowerment of women. Even after I leave office, I shall continue my efforts, and we shall continue the fight.

I thank you for our wonderful partnership these past 10 years. I have valued immeasurably your support and your sisterhood. I wish you continued courage and strength in the years ahead, for the benefit of all women, men and children around the world.

* * * * *

For information media • not an official record