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Empowerment of women and girls tops agenda at UN Economic and Social Council



Economic and Social Council President for 2010, Ambassador Hamidon Ali (Malaysia)

28 June 2010 – The annual high-level segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)) opened today with speakers calling for women and girls to be placed at the centre of the global struggle to achieve the social and economic targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

This year's focus "allows us to strengthen the linkages between gender equality, women's human rights and non-discrimination as a basis for progress in development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals," said ECOSOC President Hamidon Ali, referring to the eight goals that world leaders have agreed to try to realize before their 2015 deadline.

In his opening address to the meeting, held at UN Headquarters in New York, Mr. Ali said that while the third goal relates directly to the empowerment of women, "all MDGs are dependant upon women having a greater say in their own development."

He noted specifically the need for greater cooperation to end violence against women and girls, and the empowerment of rural women as a critical force in reducing poverty and hunger.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his opening [remarks](#), told government ministers that "until women and girls are liberated from poverty and injustice, all our goals – peace, security, sustainable development – stand in jeopardy."

Mr. Ban noted that this year is a “landmark year for gender issues” with the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – which remains the most comprehensive global policy framework to achieve the goals of gender equality, development and peace – and the 10th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 on women and peace and security.

In addition to senior UN officials, the audience heard today from special speakers, including Michelle Bachelet, former Chilean president.

Recalling her own election as the first female Chilean president and the increasing participation of women in the political sphere, Ms. Bachelet called on the international community “to move mountains” to end the persistent injustice the women faced.

Meanwhile, Frances Stewart, Professor of Development Economics and Director of the Centre for Research and Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity at Oxford University, warned that the progress made to date was being threatened by intersecting crises of food security, financial markets, human rights and security, and climate change.

She cautioned that the least progress was being made in the security domain, where despite a decline in wars and violent conflict over the past 15 years, general violence of which women were the prime victims remained unacceptably high.

In addition to the annual ministerial review, the high-level segment of the ECOSOC substantive session will include the Development Cooperation Forum, which aims to strengthen global partnerships for development.

The end result of this week’s discussions will be a “short and action-oriented” ministerial declaration that can be “understood by the man-in-the-street,” Mr. Ali said.

The declaration will serve as a component to this September’s high-level summit convened by Mr. Ban to try to urge world leaders to accelerate progress towards the MDGs ahead of 2015.

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