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**“Women’s Economic Empowerment Critical to Achieving the MDGs”
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Good afternoon. It is a great pleasure to be here among such distinguished participants and guests. I want to thank Tomiko Okazaki, Minister of State for Gender Equality. I also want to thank Yukako Uchinaga, President of the organizing committee.

My statement today will touch on where we stand globally with respect to women’s economic participation and empowerment and then what we need to do to ensure the empowerment of women and its contribution to achieving the MDGs.

First on where we stand today.

Over the last 20 years, the participation of women in the economy and in society has increased dramatically—as have the challenges women face. Globally, the share of women in paid employment outside agriculture has increased steadily, if slowly, during that period and is now 41 per cent. But serious disparities exist, both in countries and across regions. Thus in southern Asia and Northern Africa only 20 per cent of those employed outside agriculture are women. And in all countries women still trail behind men in terms of access to secure employment, assets and credit, as well as in wage and income levels and inheritance and ownership rights.

The ILO now estimates that as a result of the global economic and financial crisis, up to 18.7 million women have become unemployed. For those who still have jobs, women are paid less on average than men for the same job, earning between 70 and 90 percent of men’s wages. While the gender pay gap had been slowly narrowing from 2000 to 2007, since the onset of the economic crisis, progress has stalled, and in some countries the pay gap has in fact widened.

With five years remaining until the deadline for achieving the MDGs, in 2015, world leaders are gathering tomorrow at the 2010 MDG Summit at UN headquarters to agree on global strategies and actions to accelerate progress. As they do so, UNIFEM now part of UN Women, will present a Briefing on the gender dimensions of the MDGs, pointing to key areas where such actions are critical. This is where I come to the second part of my presentation regarding what needs to be done and what is being done to ensure women empowerment and women’s contribution to the achievement of the MDGs.

The briefing, excerpted from UNIFEM’s forthcoming *Progress of the World’s Women Report 2010-2011* on Gender Justice and the Millennium Development Goals, concludes that despite promising progress on many of the MDG targets, a more detailed

breakdown shows that national averages mask large disparities in terms of gender, income and location, with large numbers of women and girls being left behind, especially in rural areas.

The briefing identifies four critical areas where action is essential: **strengthening women's access to employment and livelihood opportunities, including land, credit and markets; increasing women's leadership, voice and influence in society; expanding women's access to public services; and ending violence against women and girls.**

Today, I will speak primarily about the first of these, increasing women's economic opportunities. Let me at the outset state that this is a moral and human rights imperative even before we come to its instrumental value for development. First and foremost, the quest for women empowerment emanates from our collective quest for dignity for all.

Beyond this intrinsic value of women empowerment, there is ample substantiation of the instrumental value for women empowerment. What it does to further development??

Studies after studies have shown that increasing women's employment and earnings is associated with reduced poverty and faster growth, better education and health outcomes for families and children and less rapid spread of HIV/AIDS. *The Economist* called women the most powerful engine of global growth, **calculating that the increased employment of women in developed economies has contributed more to such growth than has China.**

Fortunately, there are signs that world leaders are recognizing this reality. The negotiated outcome document for the MDG Summit states that investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth. It includes commitments to increase women's access to decent work, close gender gaps in wages, promote comprehensive social protection and invest in infrastructure and labour saving technology, especially in rural areas, to reduce women's unpaid care work.

The positive signs do not diminish our recognition of the great challenges. One major constraint to women's access to decent work, is the gendered division of labour within the household that assigns women most of the housework and family responsibilities. This presents a significant disadvantage to women seeking to compete for jobs with men who do not have these additional responsibilities. In addition to such services as health and education therefore, it is important to invest also in affordable child care services.

So too is ensuring women's access to productive resources, including property and land. Women's ownership and control over land not only helps to reduce poverty and increase food security but increases women's livelihood security and access to other resources, including credit and other financial products. Where they earn their own income, women have more say in domestic decision-making and may be less exposed to domestic violence.

In this connection, I should mention that estimates of the costs of violence against women and girls to public budgets and lost productivity runs in the billions of dollars each year. After years of struggle by women's rights champions, there are signs that governments are beginning to realize the moral abhorrence of violence against women and that the costs are too high. The Summit outcome document commits to strengthening comprehensive laws, policies and programmes to combat violence against women and girls, ensure their access to justice and protection and that perpetrators are prosecuted and punished.

Another challenge lies in the fact that while wage gaps tend to narrow in professional and managerial roles, women's share of senior positions still does not exceed 15 percent in any region. Quotas carry a lot of promise in this regard. Quotas have been so effective in increasing women's representation in elected office. In 2003, Norway introduced a quota of 40 percent to increase women's representation on corporate boards. Since then the proportion of women has increased by more than seven times to 44 percent. Spain and the Netherlands have introduced the same quota, while the French parliament is considering taking action.

Many of these issues are also taken up in the joint UNIFEM and UN Global Compact *Women's Empowerment Principles -- Equality Means Business*. The seven Principles offer practical guidance on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. They cover a range of actions that can be taken in such areas as corporate leadership and board representation, equal opportunity and nondiscrimination, workplace health and safety, access to education and training programmes, enterprise development and support to women entrepreneurs and community leadership and engagement. Principle 7 encourages companies to establish benchmarks and transparent processes to measure and report on progress towards their gender equality goals, using sex-disaggregated data.

Developed through a year-long consultation process and launched in March of this year, these Principles are informed by real-life business policies and practices gathered from companies across all sectors, demonstrating that the actions that can be taken are proven, practical and within reach. The brochure includes a sample of existing practices and key points about how to make and measure progress in each of the areas covered.

A CEO Statement of Support for the Women's Empowerment Principles, issued in June this year, provides a mechanism through which business leaders can signal their intention to strengthen efforts to advance and empower women and use the Principles as guideposts. To date, over 80 chief executives have signed, an indication of the growing recognition that achieving gender equality is not only the right thing to do – it is also good for business.

As part of the MDG Summit next week, government and private sector leaders will join UN and civil society representatives at the UN Private Sector Forum to discuss concrete actions the private sector can take to help close MDG gaps. Companies announcing new commitments – including those that have signed on to the CEO Statement of Support – will be recognized.



Leading Japanese companies that have signed on to the CEO Statement will also be recognized at a ceremony in Sakai on Thursday. These include Sharp, Shimano, Shiseido, Dentsu, Poppins Corp., Takashimaya, Chuo Labor Bank among many others.

However, the Principles are also intended to inform other stakeholders in their engagement and partnership with the business community. In this context, I will take this opportunity to thank all the partners that have worked so hard to promote the Women's Empowerment Principles in Japan and around the world. Let me especially highlight the partnership with the UNIFEM Japan National Committee, the UN Global Compact Network team in Tokyo and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women.

It is apt to end my statement by recognizing the value of partner-ships, and say that progress towards gender equality itself is truly a partnership endeavour. A recent milestone in this endeavour, a fruit of partnership with governments and civil society, has been the creation of UN Women last July. We count on your support, and we pledge ours, as we strive together towards more empowerment of women.

Thank you.