Thirty-fourth meeting of the Presiding Officers of the
Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean
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Statement by
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Madame Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates
Colleagues and friends,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to participate in this session of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, and to address you at this opening meeting.

The work for gender equality and empowerment of women at regional level is a critical component in the global efforts to achieve equality between women and men. The regional conferences held in 1994 galvanized the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women. The regions became effective motors for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and contributed very actively to the comprehensive review undertaken by the General Assembly in its special session in June 2000.

Spearheaded by the respective regional commissions, the regions remain today important laboratories for innovative ideas and cutting-edge approaches for how best to promote gender equality, including through gender mainstreaming. I am therefore very pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this meeting, and to get first-hand insights into current priority concerns of the Latin American and Caribbean region, especially on the linkages between democratic governance and gender equality, which is the main topic on the agenda of your meeting.

Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues

[By way of background, allow me to say a few words about the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. The Division is part of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at United Nations Headquarters. Among our main functions are: the substantive servicing of intergovernmental bodies in the follow-up to the Beijing Conference and its five-year review of June 2000. This includes the Commission on the Status of Women, which many of you regularly attend every March, as well as the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly on items pertaining to gender equality and the advancement of women. The Division is also the technical and substantive Secretariat for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which usually meets twice a year for three-week sessions, but which held an exceptional third session this August to clear the backlog of reports awaiting consideration. The Latin American and Caribbean Region is the only region where all States are parties to the Convention. The number of ratifications of the Optional Protocol from CEDAW States parties of the region has now reached 170, another sign of the commitment of the region to women's enjoyment of their human rights.

Two more functions of the Division may be worth mentioning in the context of this meeting – firstly, our catalytic work in support of gender mainstreaming into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system, especially at intergovernmental level, and secondly, participation in the United Nations system-wide network of gender experts and focal points. The

Division provides the Secretariat for the Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and manages the website: WomenWatch. This forum allows for coordination of activities, and for collaborative efforts in bringing attention to gender perspectives in a wide range of sectors/issues including ICT, programme budgeting processes, and indicators, to give just a few examples. While most of the Division's work is at the normative and policy level, we also have a small technical cooperation portfolio. These activities currently focus mainly on capacity building for national machineries in Africa. Wherever possible, the technical cooperation programmes of the Division are carried out in collaboration with the regional commissions.]

To support the implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy at national and regional levels, the Division in collaboration with the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the regional commissions, is organizing a series of regional symposium on gender mainstreaming over a five-year period. The first was held in ESCAP in December 2001 and similar symposia are planned for ECE and ESCWA in 2003. The meeting in ESCAP brought together 80 representatives of Governments, regional-level intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and civil society groups, the private sector and academia, and United Nations personnel for a constructive dialogue on gender mainstreaming in the region. The discussions focused on identifying entry points, approaches, methodologies and tools to support gender mainstreaming at the local, national, subregional and regional levels. Potentials, good practice and remaining challenges were also identified.

Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues,

Achieving greater equality between women and men requires changes at many levels, including changes in attitudes and relationships, in institutions and legal frameworks, in economic institutions, and in political decision-making structures. It requires systematic and sustained attention to gender-based inequalities in all policy areas, whether they deal with social, economic, environmental, political or security issues. Such attention is necessary through all stages of planning and policy-making processes, including budgeting, monitoring and evaluation phases. Since change rarely takes place automatically and is usually not easily achieved, national machineries for the advancement of women have an important role as catalysts to ensure that change does take place at all levels and that such change is sustainable.

Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, gender mainstreaming has been recognized as a key strategy in promoting the goal of gender equality. As stated in the Agreed Conclusions of the Economic and Social Council (1997/2), gender mainstreaming aims to make women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral part of these processes, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The Platform for Action clearly pointed out that an analysis of the effects of any planned activity on women and men, respectively, should be made before decisions are taken, that is before policies and strategies are established, actions decided on and resources allocated.

Gender mainstreaming is not an end in itself. It is a means for achieving the goal of gender equality through incorporation of gender perspectives in policy analysis and development, research, technical assistance, data collection and dissemination, institutional development and capacity-building, monitoring and evaluation. The rationale for the strategy is both to ensure equality between women and men, and the effective and sustainable achievement of the goals of the United Nations in all areas. The goals of the United Nations cannot be achieved unless all stakeholders can influence, participate in and benefit from development activities in all areas.

The emphasis on the gender mainstreaming strategy was reiterated by the 23rd special session of the General Assembly in June 2000, and most recently, in Assembly resolution 56/133 of December 2001, which stressed the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in the implementation of and follow-up to the Millennium Declaration. The Agreed Conclusions 1997/2 of the Economic and Social Council further clarified the strategy, and provided a comprehensive

set of recommendations addressed to the intergovernmental machinery, as well as to the entities of the United Nations system, on the steps necessary to translate the strategy into practice.

Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues

Since 1995, considerable progress has been made in terms of clarifying the gender perspectives in many sectoral areas. Entities of the UN system have, for example, continued with the development of specific policies and strategies aimed at achieving gender equality; the incorporation of gender aspects in sectoral policies and strategies; and the development of specific operational activities, such as research, data collection, advocacy and projects. Institutional activities, such as capacity building including training, methodology development, and development of monitoring and accountability mechanisms are also undertaken by many entities. Progress has also been made in putting together tools for gender mainstreaming, including guidelines, manuals, and checklists. Coordination and information-sharing activities, including inter-agency activities, and collaboration with NGOs are also part of such gender mainstreaming efforts.

[The importance of identifying and addressing the differential impact of policies and programmes on women and men is now also increasingly recognized in the programme budget of the United Nations. For two budget biennia, instructions have been included in the guidance note to programme managers on the requirement to mainstream gender perspectives. This guidance clarifies that mainstreaming a gender perspective in programme budget submissions does not in itself imply additional activities. Rather, it requires a refocusing of activities and visible attention to gender dimensions in the formulation of expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement. Such refocusing should be based on a clear understanding that attention to gender perspectives supports results-based management and more effective achievement of the goals of the overall programme of work.

Concerted efforts have also been made, in the context of interagency collaboration, and by individual entities of the United Nations, to bring greater attention to gender perspectives in intergovernmental processes, including the Special Sessions of the General Assembly. To give just one example, the preparatory process for the International Conference on Financing for Development provided an opportunity for United Nations gender experts, interested delegations, academics and representatives from civil society to engage in dialogue around the gender perspectives on issues of domestic and international resources for development, trade, ODA, debt, and systemic issues. The Monterrey process allowed for an unprecedented degree of inter-action between "mainstream" economists and feminist economists and activists around issues of common concern, but from different perspectives. While many were still disappointed with the degree of attention to gender perspectives in the Monterrey Consensus, the coordinated and sustained efforts undertaken opened doors that were very closed until recently. An increased awareness of the relevance and importance of gender perspectives on economic issues was certainly achieved. It will now be critical in the follow-up to ensure the sustainability – and expansion – of the gains achieved.

Another policy area worth mentioning is peace and security, as this is a field where we have long seen resistance to the recognition of the importance and relevance of gender perspectives. With the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), an instrument has been created for systematically identifying and addressing gender perspectives in relation to peace-building, peace-making, peacekeeping, disarmament, humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation and reconstruction. The study of the Secretary-General on women, peace and security, called for by the Security Council and expected to be completed in October 2002, will give an overview of the gender perspectives and of women's particular needs in situations of armed conflict, and in peacebuilding and rehabilitation.]

Within the Economic and Social Council itself, although its subsidiary machinery was directed already in 1997 to integrate gender perspectives in all areas of work, no systematic

follow-up was put in place. When the Council created, in 2001, a new regular item on its annual substantive agenda to monitor and evaluate gender mainstreaming, the Council implicitly acknowledged that a more focused effort was necessary to ensure a consistent application and implementation of this strategy across the board at both intergovernmental level and within the entities of the United Nations. To stimulate effective discussion at the first-time consideration of this item last July, the Division – together with the Office of the Special Adviser and the Division for ECOSOC Support and Coordination- organized a panel discussion on mainstreaming gender perspectives in the functional commissions of the Council. The panel provided an opportunity to share experiences on lessons learned, good practices and challenges ahead with regard to gender mainstreaming in the selected sectoral areas falling within the responsibility of the functional commissions represented at the panel [i.e. Commission for Social Development, United Nations Forum on Forests, and Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice]. Panellist and delegates also engaged in a discussion on the particular role of the Economic and Social Council in monitoring the systematic implementation of the mainstreaming strategy, and in evaluating achievements made and obstacles encountered.

Consistent and systematic monitoring and evaluation of progress in gender mainstreaming is required to enhance the knowledge base, and allow for corrective action. Since 1997, regular reporting to intergovernmental bodies on steps taken, progress achieved and obstacles encountered allows us to make a limited assessment of how far we have come, and what still remains to be done. Secretary-General's reports on the follow-up to and progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly, are submitted annually to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the General Assembly, in an effort to enhance monitoring and evaluation. The report to the CSW focuses on measures taken by the entities of the UN system to incorporate gender perspectives in activities across all policy areas; the report to ECOSOC highlights the actions taken by the Council and its subsidiary bodies to bring attention to gender perspectives; and the report to the General Assembly reviews steps taken by the Assembly and its main committees in promoting the achievement of the goal of gender equality through the gender mainstreaming strategy. Focus is also placed in this report on actions taken in relation to the follow-up to the Millennium Declaration and at major events during the past year [for example, the report to the 57th session of the General Assembly takes up the International Conference on Financing for Development; Special Session on Children; and the Second World Assembly on Ageing]. It also discusses the catalytic role of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women.

Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues

I would like now to turn briefly to the main topic of this meeting - gender and democratic governance. Governance is certainly a topical subject, being much discussed in the context of discussions on globalization and recently, in relation to sustainable development at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (26 August – 4 September, 2002).

Governance[1] refers essentially to the manner in which power is exercised and distributed in society - how decisions are taken, and how citizens have their say. It covers both the formal

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[1] Governance has been defined by the United Nations as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It is comprised of the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. Governance touches upon issues such as the interaction between the state and civil society, the legal framework, public administration, economic development, development policies, and peace and security. It is thus critical for political, legislative, economic, social and environmental outcomes, including for poverty eradication and gender equality. Necessary preconditions for effective, democratic and gender-sensitive governance have been identified as transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, participation, responsiveness and predictability. (Joint Workshop on Governance, Poverty Reduction and Gender Equality, Organized by The United Nations Interagency

and informal institutions (values, norms, rules and regulations) by which authority is exercised. It cannot be narrowly defined in terms of political or economic decision-making processes. In its broadest sense, governance is related to social systems and processes. It often concerns the exercise of power in the management of resources – economic, social, political and environmental resources critical for human security and sustainable development.

Ensuring that all stakeholders can participate in and benefit from governance requires that the issue of power is addressed and there is an explicit focus on empowerment strategies. The empowerment of women involves women themselves – as individuals and in groups - acquiring the ability to identify the power structures, processes and relationships which subordinate them, and to make strategic choices on how to address these effectively. Some important elements of governance which are, or can be, empowering for women have been identified. Information dissemination to all groups in society - women as well as men - is one. Consultation with all stakeholders, including all groups of women, and development of effective participatory approaches is another. Gender-sensitive human resources development is also critical. Institution-building – development of transparent rules, regulations and procedures, with in-built accountability mechanisms - to ensure that women can be actively involved and their needs and priorities met is another important element. Supporting the development of a vibrant, well-organized civil society at the local level, including women's groups and networks, is another precondition.

Questions have to be asked as to whether governance structures and processes facilitate or hinder women's empowerment; and whether they effectively address the significant existing gender inequalities in terms of opportunities and outcomes between men and women, or perpetuate or even exacerbate these inequalities. The answers to these questions are important, not only for the promotion of gender equality, but also as an indicator of the effective achievement of the goals of democratic governance. Ensuring gains for women in the promotion of effective and sustainable democratic governance requires explicit attention to their priorities and needs.

Some attention should be given here to decentralization processes since, as part of strategies for effective governance, they aim to ensure greater transparency, accountability, consultation and participation in decision making and resource allocation at local levels. A major challenge in decentralization processes - whether driven from the top or from the bottom - is the management of competing needs and demands/claims of different groups in society. This challenge can only be met if there is sufficient knowledge of the social realities of the different groups involved. Understanding of the specific context must include, as an integral part, an understanding of the gender equality situation.

Decentralization may facilitate local governance structures and processes which are more open to public scrutiny, more accountable to communities as a whole, and more responsive to the concerns of specific groups, including women. This is not, however, automatic. Decentralization may simply involve transfer of power and resources to a local (often male-dominated) elite at national/regional level to a similar elite at local level. In small, traditional and relatively closed or isolated communities it may be extremely difficult to ensure consultation, participation, transparency and accountability, in particular to ensure the participation of women and adequate attention to their needs and priorities. Even when governance is decentralized, officials can be quite removed from ordinary people, and particularly from women. It is sometimes difficult, even impossible, for poor and marginalized groups to know about and influence the policies their elected representatives pursue.

A major concern in governance in many countries is the continued exclusion, or token representation, of women in political and economic decision-making processes. At global level, for example, only 14.8 per cent of parliamentarians are women. Many different strategies have been put in place to increase women's participation in these processes, such as the introduction of quota systems. Quotas are applied at national as well as local levels. It is important to note, however, that the local context in which political decentralization occurs is not always inherently more democratic or more open to women's involvement than the national context. Considerable specific support is required to ensure that women can participate effectively at all levels. Firstly, because women have traditionally been excluded from decision-making processes and may not understand the processes and rules of engagement, and secondly, because women's participation is a recent innovation the environment in which they have to work may be hostile to their involvement. Strategies to deal with this have included extra training for women, support to the establishment of networks of women in similar situations, efforts to create positive environments and advocacy at all levels. It also needs to be noted that participation of women - in any arena and in any form, including political participation - is almost always discussed as inherently positive for women. The possible costs of participation for different groups of women need to be taken into account.

An important element in governance is resource allocation. There is increased recognition that, because of existing gender inequalities, public policies have different impact upon and lead to different outcomes for women and men, and that the expenditures attached to such policies do not benefit women and men equally because of these existing inequalities. Analysis of the potential impact already during the formulation of resource allocations and expenditure plans allows for corrective measures. Today, well over forty countries have undertaken steps, to different degrees and in different forms, to enhance attention to gender perspectives in national planning and budgeting. Some of the experience from projects to promote the inclusion of gender perspectives in local budget processes has shown that women can be considerably empowered in these processes. "Budget literacy" - basic understanding of what a budget is, how it is developed, what limits there are on the power of elected officials, and what rights citizens have in relation to resource allocations and budget processes - can lead women to make unprecedented demands for information and accountability - requiring local officials to answer to commitments made in elections for resource allocations to priority needs of women, such as health and education.

Some attention should also be given to information and communication technologies (ICT) in discussions of gender and democratic governance. The potential of ICT for development is well recognized. Heads of State and Government resolved, in the Millennium Declaration, to ensure that the benefits of new technologies, and especially of ICT, are available to all. As an information- and knowledge-based tool, the potential of ICT for participation, networking and advocacy among citizens and for political, economic or social purposes is vast. ICT provide the means for enhancing interaction between Governments and their citizens. The potential of ICT for stimulating economic growth, social development and political participation is recognized, but it is increasingly apparent that their benefits are unevenly distributed between and within countries, mainly because of differential access to knowledge and ICT. Many different actors have highlighted the "gender divide" within the digital divide, which is reflected not only in the lower numbers of women users of ICT, compared to men, but also in the persistence of gender-specific structural inequalities that constitute barriers to access. In particular, inequalities between women and men at all levels of decision-making constitute serious constraints to women's participation in shaping the role of ICT as a tool for development. Furthermore, as ICT reshape the world of work and commerce, educational opportunities and health systems, they have the potential to perpetuate existing gender-based inequalities in access, use and opportunities, as well as to create new forms of inequality between women and men.

Ensuring that both women and men will be able to influence decisions and resource allocations requires going beyond simply increasing the number of women in different positions, to providing real opportunities for influencing the agendas, institutions and processes of

governance. This is what is normally called the transformative process. Values, norms, rules, procedures and practices can effectively restrict women's potential to make real choices, and make efforts to give explicit attention to relevant gender perspectives very difficult. The discourse, procedures, structures and functions of governments at all levels often remain heavily skewed in favour of participation of men and attention to their priorities and needs.

Governance structures and processes can indeed be empowering for women but only if empowerment is an explicit goal and well defined strategies, adequate resources and commitment at top levels are in place. For some time to come there will have to be specific support mechanisms to allow women to play an effective role in political and economic decision-making processes. Gender perspectives need to be identified and addressed as an integral part of all analyses, policy development and planning and implementation processes in the promotion of effective democratic governance.

Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues

Finally I would like to say a few words on some of the serious gaps and challenges in the implementation of gender mainstreaming which remain to be addressed. Despite the positive changes described, much remains to be done before gender perspectives are systematically incorporated across all policy areas.

One persistent concern is that, despite all the knowledge gained and the efforts made at research, data collection, policy development and programme implementation, gender perspectives are still not seen as an integral part of work in all areas of the work of the United Nations. It is true that in some areas more research and data collection is required. In most areas, however, we do already have the necessary knowledge to make significant change. Just to take one area that is very familiar to me personally – gender and water resources management - much of what we know today, and particularly related to domestic water supplies and sanitation, we knew already in the early 1970s. An unresolved question thus remains: why – when we have the knowledge on the contributions, needs and priorities of women as well as men and can easily identify the inequalities that need to be addressed – are gender perspectives not systematically taken into account in research, data analysis, policy and programme development? Why is the incorporation of relevant and important gender perspectives still not seen as essential for achievement of the goals of the United Nations and its Member States?

A second issue of concern is the risk for lip-service. It is relatively easy to develop policies and strategies, and even guidelines on gender mainstreaming, in different areas. It is far more difficult to translate these into action on the ground. Many excellent policies, strategies and guidelines therefore remain paper products without adequate allocation of financial and human resources to ensure their implementation.
An essential requirement is also explicit commitment at top management level - going beyond the politically correct statements in speeches and statements to requiring systematic monitoring of, and reporting on, policies and strategies and utilization of guidelines and tools developed and demanding accountability from all staff.

It is important to recognize that gender mainstreaming requires both a technical process - development of guidelines, tools and capacity-building, and a political process involving explicit expression of political will from top levels in organizations, incorporation of the goal of gender equality and the gender mainstreaming approach in all policies and strategies as well as the allocation of necessary resources.

Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues

I wish you a most successful meeting and I look forward to hearing about the experiences in the region on gender mainstreaming in relation to democratic governance.
Thank you.