



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Fiftieth session**

27 February-10 March 2006

Item 3 (c) (ii) of the provisional agenda\*

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women  
and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled  
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace  
for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic  
objectives and action in critical areas of concern and  
further actions and initiatives: equal participation of women  
and men in decision-making processes at all levels**

### **Statement submitted by Equality Now, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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\* E/CN.6/2006/1.

## Statement

In the sixty-one years since the United Nations was founded, no woman has ever been elected to serve as Secretary-General, despite the fact that there are many qualified candidates. Women are underrepresented in the ranks of the organization, as well as at the top. As of 30 June 2005, women occupied only 37.1 per cent of professional and higher positions and only 16.2 per cent of the Under-Secretaries-General were women. Women's unequal access to positions of decision-making power hinders progress towards all the United Nations' goals, including equality, development and peace.

The election of a new United Nations Secretary-General will take place later this year, when the term of current Secretary-General Kofi Annan comes to an end. The Security Council is responsible for recommending a candidate for Secretary-General to the General Assembly. Tradition has it that the post of Secretary-General should rotate so that each geographical region gets its "turn." Women have never had a "turn," and there are many qualified women from all regions of the world who could serve as Secretary-General.

The Platform for Action adopted in 1995 in Beijing at the Fourth World Conference on Women called for the development of "mechanisms to nominate women candidates for appointment to senior posts in the United Nations" and set the target of "overall gender equality, particularly at the Professional level and above, by the year 2000." Every year the General Assembly adopts a resolution on the "Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat," lamenting the lack of progress that has been made and calling for the achievement of gender balance in the staffing of the Secretariat.

Equality Now urges the Commission to demonstrate its commitment to women's equal participation in decision-making processes at all levels by urging member states to propose and support the election of qualified women candidates to the post of Secretary-General.

There are many laws around the world that prevent women from being able fully to participate in public life, as well as discriminating against women in other spheres. At its forty-ninth session last year, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted a resolution sponsored by the governments of Rwanda and the Philippines and cosponsored by 21 other countries to consider the advisability at this session of the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women. Such a Special Rapporteur could support and facilitate the continued implementation of the commitment made in the Beijing Platform for Action, with a subsequent target date of 2005 established in the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000, to "revoke any remaining laws that discriminate on the basis of sex". That date is now past us, yet many explicitly discriminatory laws remain in force.

Equality Now urges the Commission to demonstrate its commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by establishing a Special Rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women to implement this undertaking.