

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
Tuesday, 8 March 1994

From Promises to Success

*Statement of Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky
Director-General
United Nations Office at Geneva*

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a privilege for me to be invited to participate in this commemoration of the International Women's day.

This year's celebration of International Women's Day takes place at a time when women continue to make a rich and varied contribution, and embrace a myriad of challenging roles throughout the world in which we live. The scope of their achievements matches all human performances and we at the United Nations are particularly proud of the way in which UNHCR is fulfilling its role under the direction of Ms. Ogata, and the action undertaken by Ms. Bertini, Executive Director of the World Food Programme who has spared time to be with us today. I cannot omit mentioning the tireless work of our women staff members in different parts of the UN system especially those working in field operations.

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 the true objective of the global community has been to achieve equality between and respect amongst men and women. It is a goal, as the experience of many years shows, which is not easily attainable due to political, economic, cultural and religious differences and the practices of diverse societies and ethnic groups.

The proclamation of International Women's Year in 1975, and the United Nations Decade for Women from 1975 to 1985 has led to intensified efforts to promote development and equality. Since that time women have become more integrated in the world development programme and have contributed to the strengthening of world peace. Many conferences, seminars, summits and conventions and several commissions established by

the General Assembly have brought certain positive results with regard to the advancement of the status of women throughout the world, and their integration in economic, social and political activities.

And yet that is not enough. We all know that the struggle to recognize the intrinsic value and rights of women in all countries goes on - in the same manner as the world continues to resolve the problems of peace, development and democracy.

The United Nations, as a unique association of states, is committed to improving its capacity to create conditions of stability and well-being and to promoting social and economic progress in all parts of the world. Equally important is the Organization's conviction to enhance respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is here that the women come into the picture. It is today that we have to recommit our belief that human rights includes the promotion and protection of women's rights. It is in this room that we, in Geneva, should declare our continued devotion to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in the world. On this point, I should like to inform you that the Commission on Human Rights has just adopted a resolution devoted to "*integrating the rights of women into the human rights mechanism of the United Nations*" which calls for inter alia the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on the Question of Violence Against Women.

The Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing next year will be a great affirmation of the world's commitment to the protection and implementation of human rights as they relate to women, and will provide opportunities to identify and implement practical and

sound solutions for individual governments to take. Hand-in-hand to achieve all these goals are the contributions of United Nations agencies and programmes and of the non-governmental organizations.

I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the non-governmental organizations that are supporting efforts to improve the status of women, in particular those which are contributing to the Sub-Committee on the Status of Women, which is an integral part of the NGO Planning Committee preparing for the forthcoming Beijing Conference. I should also like to mention the activities of the Women's Guild that we all know here in Geneva.

In the United Nations secretariat, we take satisfaction in the fact that the question of the status of women is the focus of attention of the Secretary-General and high-level administrators. Certain measures have been introduced to bring the gender balance in policy-level positions as close to 50-50 as possible by next year when we will be commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. So far, it has not been easy or simple. Although the results of the 1992 promotion exercise, taking into account in particular the cumulative seniority, were for the first time close to satisfactory, I must say that in Geneva there is progress to be made.

The latest statistics on promotion for 1992 show that out of eight individuals in Geneva who were promoted to the D-1 level, one was a woman. Amongst those promoted to the P-5 level, there were 5 women out

of a total of 23. This represents less than 25%. Nine women out of 35 were promoted to the P-4 level while 10 out of 35 were promoted to the P-3 level.

Quite frankly, with regard to the promotion register, Geneva is still lagging behind if we are to assume that there were qualified women candidates available during the last promotion exercise. Between now and next year, we shall do our best in cooperation and coordination with the Office of Human Resources Management, to secure qualified women to fill vacancies that occur in departments and offices where they are under-represented. I must emphasize to all of you that the present general policy for recruitment, extension or promotion is to give preference to a woman candidate where male and female candidates have equivalent merit and qualifications.

As the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, I wish to reassure you that all possible means are being explored and measures taken to appoint women to the most senior positions of responsibility and to improve their status throughout the Organization. I am committed to the realization of the Secretary-General's objectives concerning these questions, and of our Organization as a whole. As you know, my intention has been to make the Office of the Director-General a good example in this respect. The appointment of Ms. Djermakoye as Chief of Staff is representative of this aim. I would like, in UNOG, to rely more on women's knowledge and expertise in every aspect of our activities.

This being said, I realize that last year I made certain commitments concerning the appointment of somebody to report directly to me and

oversee the overall process in order to achieve, as far as possible, declared goals. I would not be honest with you if I did not admit that for a number of administrative reasons - and, to be more frank, bureaucratic reasons - the implementation of this promise has so far fallen short of expectations.

However, I am extremely happy today to announce that in consultation with the Executive-Secretary of ECE and with the acceptance of Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic, I have appointed her to be the Focal Point for women in Geneva and I am equally grateful to the Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General for the Department on Humanitarian Affairs, for having made available Ms. Nahla Haidar who has agreed to be the Deputy Focal Point. Our two colleagues have accepted to fulfil these important duties on a voluntary basis. I should like to thank them personally as well as on your behalf. I am sure that most of you are aware of their qualifications in assuming these functions as both have been part of UN Joint Staff bodies at various levels for a long time. Our two distinguished colleagues are currently, as far as the terms of reference of their positions allow, preparing an outline plan of action to be finalized by end-April.

It is my intention to circulate the announcement of these appointments including their course of action and availability, shortly, and once again reiterate my satisfaction that they have accepted the challenge to implement the important tasks attached to these posts of responsibility. Both Ms. Pastizzi-Ferencic and Ms. Haidar will, I can assure you, have immediate access both to myself and my Directors. These appointments are a first step, the next step is to establish a plan of action, and the implementation of UNOG policy regarding the situation of women will become a key issue.

I strongly believe that UNOG will be capable, in the whole of the United Nations system, of being among the first to improve the situation of women. International Women's Day is not only a time for ceremonies and reflections, but much more a time to stimulate action. When the aim of these actions is to create equal opportunities for men and women, our Organization has to face the highest expectations that people place upon us.

Together we will continue the struggle to help the world understand and accept that the rights of women are also human rights and that women have the same rights to improvement in their professional, personal and social life. Today, I call upon each and everyone of you to make your own valuable contribution to the fight to attain equal rights, social improvement and peace. Time is of the essence and the road is still long before us. Together we can fulfil the desires of years gone by.

Thank you for your attention.