

**STATEMENT TO THE FIFTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE SUB-COMMISSION
ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

ITEM 6: SPECIFIC HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES: (a) Women's Human Rights

8 August 2005

Statement by Conchita Poncini,
International Federation of University Women

Mr. Chair,

The International Federation of University Women and the Federation of Business Women International, co-conveners of the Working Group on Women's Employment and Economic Development of the Geneva NGO Committee on the Status of Women of the Conference of NGOs, call attention to two major resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights in its 61st Session that specifically address women's rights and mainstreaming a gender perspective in the most comprehensive manner are found in Documents 2005/41 (Elimination of Violence Against Women and 2005/42 (Integrating the Human Rights of women throughout the United Nations system). It has however not highlighted women's equality in economic empowerment and women's equal participation in decision making in the world of work, Yet these are two areas that are fundamental to making gender equality a reality in civil, political, social and cultural rights.

The ILO's 2004 updated publication on "Breaking through the Glass Ceiling" first published in 2001, provides witness to the fact that while women represent over 40% of the global labour force, approximately 70% in developed countries and 60% in developing countries, there has been little change on women's share in professional and managerial jobs. Cultural and social attitudes have kept occupational segregation of "male" and "female" jobs, the latter remaining in lower job categories and low-paying jobs. The study also revealed that family responsibilities play a major role in determining women's absence from management and leadership positions, whether in politics or in private business.

These inequalities persist despite the 4 key ILO Conventions that aim to promote gender equality in the world of work: C-100 on Equal Remuneration are basic rights call for equal pay for men and women for work of equal value and C. 111 on Discrimination on Employment and Occupation calls for a national policy to eliminate discrimination in access to employment, training and working conditions. C. 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities is an enabling convention that calls for men and women sharing work and family responsibilities and C. 183 on Maternity Protection which provides for the protection of women's child-bearing role.

We believe that ratification of the two basic conventions on equal pay and on non-discrimination in employment and occupation are essential. But unless proactive policies and corporate culture are built into the system to provide the infrastructure and favourable conditions to be in place on the reproductive rights of women stipulated in C156 and C183, the aims of the basic equality conventions cannot be fully achieved. The role of men and boys are fundamental in sharing with childcare which, up to the present, has been the greatest burden of women as primary care givers.

We propose that the Sub-Commission in co-ordination with ILO, UNCTAD and other concerned UN bodies, should look at other bench-marking indicators that would identify gender gaps in the equal enjoyment of women's rights to decent work and to a paradigm shift in economic models that would give women an equal level playing field. In this regard, the Sub-Commission should bear in mind that women are not a homogenous category. Different women engage with the economy in diverse and complex ways as economic actors, entrepreneurs and decision-makers. Women represent the majority of the world's poor and the negative impacts of economic policy affect them disproportionately. For example, privatisation of health services has increased the responsibility of women for the care of the elders due to lack of quality care and the increased cost of the care. Policies of attracting foreign direct investments by lowering standards of worker protection can expose women to low paid work in exploitative conditions as experienced in export processing zones.

Finally, the challenge is to look at global economic governance systems and how these affect working women and those living in poverty.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.

9 August 2005