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**Statement by
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TO THE SIDE EVENT ON “GENDER-SENSITIVE NATIONAL SANITATION
POLICIES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES”
New York, 14 May 2008**

Your Highness, Excellencies, distinguished panellists and participants:

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this discussion on gender-sensitive national sanitation policies, organized by my Department, DESA, in collaboration with the Gender and Water Task Force.

We are meeting immediately following the review on water and sanitation decisions by the Commission on Sustainable Development. Water has been on the international agenda for quite some time. But the issue of sanitation received global recognition, for the first time, in 2002, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. There, governments agreed to a specific target to cut the proportion of people without basic sanitation in half by 2015. This complemented the MDG target on safe drinking water.

The question of women’s access to sanitation points up the close inter-linkages between poverty, gender and sustainable development. In developing countries, women are, *in fact*, the primary providers of water

inputs to domestic consumption, health, sanitation and other productive activities. But women often suffer the most from lack of basic sanitation services.

We know that lack of sanitation in schools keeps girls from obtaining a proper education. And we know that lack of sanitation services can cause disease and poor health.

Living conditions in urban slums are far worse without sanitation facilities. Environmental damage results when cities and rural areas have poor drainage and lack of sewage treatment.

Access to sanitation has an immediate impact in reducing infant and child mortality and improving the situation of women, in terms of both their dignity and security.

We face a major challenge. To meet the MDGs, an additional 120 million people per year need access to sanitation services. This will cost \$142 billion in all.

It is indeed a formidable challenge. But this year, the International Year of Sanitation, holds some opportunities. By raising awareness and keeping political momentum high, we can build on recent successes.

These successes include the School Sanitation and Hygiene Education campaign and the Water and Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

campaign which have placed an emphasis on children and youth and gender-sensitive hygiene education.

We have an opportunity to take a closer look at possibilities for creative financing of sanitation facilities by emulating and expanding on successful public sector projects and public-private partnership projects.

Governments actually spend about \$2.5 billion each year on sanitation. How can we make sure that the poor benefit from these expenditures with expanded access, and that women are served? Can we leverage this amount with other funding sources? National and local governments, the private sector, donor countries and philanthropic organizations all have a role to play.

I can tell you frankly that the UN also has a role to play. UN agencies and programmes, many of which are represented here today, work together under UN-Water to ensure that limited resources are used wisely. Our work is guided by the decisions taken at Johannesburg in 2002 and the CSD in its annual sessions.

Your Highness, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

Let us seize the opportunity provided by this Year to take action. We must adopt gender-sensitive national sanitation policies, and help define implementation strategies, to ensure that sanitation challenges are effectively met. We must spur action on the ground.

Let us take up the challenge and work together to make sure that, this Year, access to sanitation is expanded by at least 120 million women.

Thank you.