

Guatemala City, Guatemala, 21 January 2009 - Secretary-General's message to Second Ministerial Meeting of the Non-aligned Movement on the Advancement of Women [Delivered by Rachel Mayanja, UN Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women]

This Second Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement on the Advancement of Women offers a valuable opportunity to push for greater progress on the critical issue of gender equality.

Women's empowerment is an important goal in itself – but it is also the key to realizing all of the other major international development targets. That is because healthy, productively employed and politically engaged women can drive efforts to eradicate hunger, disease and poverty.

Since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, there has been remarkable progress on the gender agenda, with countries working to reduce inequalities in education, employment and political representation.

But we have a long road ahead. Too many girls cannot get an education beyond primary school. And even if they do, they struggle to find a job. Women continue to face higher unemployment rates than men. And women who do work are often stuck in low-paying jobs with little security.

To truly empower women on the labor market, we must promote decent work principles: equity in pay, a reduction in occupational segregation, and support for women's entrepreneurship. We must also take measures that allow both women and men to balance work and family life.

We should also increase women's access to political decision-making while raising their stature in other arenas, such as the private sector, academia, civil society and the media.

Above all, we need to intensify action on maternal health, the goal on which progress has been the slowest. We must work to provide universal access to reproductive health by 2015. More than half a million women die each year because of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. We cannot allow this terrible death toll to continue.

Addressing women's public health also means stopping violence against women. I urge all of you to support the campaign I have launched to unite the international community on this issue. The abuse of women is a violation of human rights and an

enormous obstacle to development, and has no place in our world.

If all of you gathered here today resolve to put the rights, priorities and contributions of women and girls at the top of the development agenda, we can make real progress in helping all people in society. I look forward to working with you in that endeavour, and offer you my best wishes for a successful meeting.