

Welcome Address for the 2009 International Women's Day Forum

By Yozo Yokota, Special Adviser to the Rector, UNU

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U Thant International Conference Hall, United Nations University

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to extend to you my warmest welcome to the "2009 International Women's Day Forum". My name is Yozo Yokota, Special Adviser to the Rector of the United Nations University. Usually, it is the Rector, Professor Konrad Osterwalder, who speaks on an important occasion like this representing the United Nations University as well as the United Nations Organization. However, the Rector is now on an important mission overseas. Before he left Tokyo, he had asked me to make a welcome address on his behalf. It is therefore my special honour and pleasure to say a few words about the event.

As the letter of invitation by the Rector clearly states, this forum is organized jointly by the United Nations University and other UN agencies in Japan. I should like to thank all these UN agencies who have agreed to co-sponsor the public symposium under the topic: "Women and Men: United to End Violence against Women."

Since its creation, the United Nations has taken initiatives to combat discrimination against women in various ways. It has created a number of important institutions dealing with gender issue including the Commission on the Status of Women and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). It has proclaimed International Women's Year and the United Nations Decade for Women. It has organized four global UN women's conferences and drafted several important international declarations and conventions on women, a milestone of which is undoubtedly the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979, exactly 30 years ago.

Apart from these achievements, the United Nations has begun to emphasize the strategy of "mainstreaming women (or gender)" in all activities of the United Nations starting from the area of "the maintenance of international peace and security" to the various activities in the fields of "economic, social, cultural and humanitarian concerns". This means that all UN activities, whether peace operations, disarmament, economic,

development, international financing, cultural and educational activities or environmental protection, must always pay due and priority regard to the issue of gender and women. Thus, today, practically all UN organs and agencies, not only those specifically mandated to deal with the issue of women but also those with wider mandates such as UNDP, UNICEF, UNEP, UNCTAD, UNESCO, ILO, WHO, WFP, World Bank, IMF, are required to give priority to the gender role and gender implications of their respective activities. The basic idea behind this trend is that all global issues that humankind faces today cannot be adequately addressed, or problems fairly resolved, without the full participation of women who compose half of the world's population.

It is hoped that today's symposium will contribute to promote the status of women in all levels of society, empower women in all respects and eradicate all kinds of violence against women, because as long as women do not fully enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms equally with men, particularly freedom from want and freedom from fear, the world cannot be peaceful nor prosperous.