

MR. CHAIRMAN,

I AM PLEASED TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK ONCE AGAIN ON THE QUESTION OF THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN. THE YEAR THAT HAS PASSED SINCE I LAST ADDRESSED THE THIRD COMMITTEE ON THIS TOPIC HAS NOT, I BELIEVE, BEEN A PARTICULARLY AUSPICIOUS TIME FOR EITHER WOMEN OR THEIR ADVANCEMENT. CONTINUING CIVIL AND INTER-COMMUNAL CONFLICTS, DROUGHT, HUNGER AND A DECLINING PUBLIC ROLE FOR WOMEN IN SOME AREAS ARE AMONG THE MANY NEGATIVE FACTORS MARKING THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS.

YET, THIS PERIOD ALSO HAS BEEN MARKED BY SOME IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS FOR WOMEN. THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, FOR INSTANCE, IN JUNE OF THIS YEAR ADOPTED A STRONG TEXT ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EQUALITY. PREPARATIONS FOR THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN ARE WELL UNDERWAY AND A SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE HAS BEEN NAMED. OF GREAT INTEREST TO CANADA IS THE PROGRESS THAT HAS BEEN MADE ON THE DRAFT DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WHICH WE ARE CONFIDENT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY WILL ADOPT DURING THIS SESSION. THIS TIME LAST YEAR, A FINALISED TEXT AND ITS ADOPTION SEEMED A LONG WAY AWAY. THEREFORE, WHILE THIS HAS BEEN A TIME WHEN MANY OF THE CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN IN THEIR PURSUIT OF THEIR RIGHTS AND EQUALITY HAVE APPEARED STARK AND INSURMOUNTABLE, IT ALSO HAS PROVED TO BE A TIME FOR MODEST BUT CONCRETE HOPE, MARKED WITH SEVERAL IMPORTANT MILESTONES IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN.

IN MY OWN COUNTRY, THE RELEASE OF THE FINAL REPORT OF THE CANADIAN PANEL ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN - THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE EXERCISE OF ITS KIND THUS FAR TO HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN - SHOWED VIOLENCE TO BE WIDESPREAD AND COMMON TO ALL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL GROUPS. AS WELL AS IDENTIFYING THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM, THE PANEL ALSO PRESENTED A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN AIMED AT THE TOTAL ERADICATION OF ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WHICH IS CURRENTLY UNDER REVIEW AND CONSIDERATION. FOR THE FIRST TIME, WE IN CANADA ARE FACING UP TO THE PROBLEM, HAVE A BETTER IDEA OF ITS EXTENT AND HAVE BEGUN THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFYING THE TOOLS NEEDED FOR ITS ELIMINATION. IT WILL TAKE TIME, BUT WE ARE MAKING PROGRESS.