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**Gender Roundtable
Gender Equality and Growth Prospects for SPECA Region**

**Remarks of Mr. Kim Hak-Su
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic
and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

**Madame Chairperson, Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am pleased to share some thoughts with you at this Gender Roundtable hosted by the Commission on Women, Family and Children of Azerbaijan. I recall with appreciation the roundtable on 'gender and the economy' hosted by the Kazakhstan National Commission on Family Affairs and Gender Policy in May 2005. It is only befitting that the important initiatives taken by these two countries have been duly recognized and they have been elected as Co-chairs of the newly-established Working Group on Gender and the Economy.

The establishment of the Working Group is a significant development adding a new dimension to the SPECA work plan. It will bring into focus women's contribution to – or benefits from -- economic growth. Over the years, large numbers of women in this sub-region have suffered from the lack of opportunities for employment in the formal sector and fallen into poverty. They have had to look to the informal sector for opportunities to earn a living.

SPECA countries do have highly skilled, trained and educated women, whose potential contribution to national development has often been under-utilized. Hence, small and medium enterprises can help realise women's potential as entrepreneurs and thereby enable them to contribute meaningfully to economic development. However, at the domestic level, an essential pre-requisite for success is a favourable legal and economic policy environment. Internationally, to become truly competitive in a globalized world, there is also need for support such as access to credit and new technologies as well as procedures that are efficient and not cumbersome bottle-necks.

National poverty reduction and development strategies must give attention to employment and labour markets that work for the poor and disadvantaged as a means of combating poverty and gender inequality – not simply as an outcome of economic policy. Likewise, gender equality must be recognized as essential for poverty reduction.

Prudent deployment of energy dividend can help reduce poverty and can mobilize women's economic potential if targeted appropriately. I understand that some models and experiences from various countries were discussed in the preparatory meeting on the SPECA Working Group on Gender and the Economy last December. Women's concerns could be factored into the planning of the use of such dividends and in all aspects of local and regional development.

To address challenges faced by women in the SPECA region in participating in and benefiting from economic development, UNESCAP is ready to work with UNECE, within the SPECA framework, to improve sex-disaggregated data and statistics, support women entrepreneurship and integrate a gender dimension in SPECA work programme areas.

I look forward with interest to the proceedings of this Roundtable and wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.