Ms. Kanda Vajrabhaya, The Chair of the 8th meeting of the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), opened the meeting, hoping it would be a basis for further actions among Member States and other stakeholders at regional level for the way forward in advancing gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. Such commitment will be critical to realizing a people-centred and transformative post-2015 development agenda.

Moderator: Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN-Women began by stating that this panel session will be one of the most important events of the CSW. This year CSW undertakes a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, including current challenges of implementation and opportunities for strengthening gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda. In that regard, the Regional Commissions were encouraged to undertake regional reviews so that the outcomes of intergovernmental processes at the regional level could feed into the 2015 review. All 5 Regional Commissions held intergovernmental meetings and completed regional review processes to identify remaining gaps and priority areas for action to accelerate the implementation of the Platform for Action, and identifying ways to move forward in their regions. 167 countries undertook national reviews and prepared national reports, giving the regional reviews a solid basis. Together with the regional commissions and UN Women, the civil society and other stakeholders participated actively in the regional review meetings, and enriched the debate.

Mlambo-Ngcuka called on the commissions to focus the deliberation on the way forward: How to end poverty and violence; how to ensure empowerment of women and girls everywhere; and what it will take to realize this vision. The focus of the discussion was on ways, strategies and measures to implement the reached agreements from the regional review meetings, and to seek a coherent approach that brings all stakeholders together.

Panelists:

Ms. Rima Khalaf, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) started out by stating that notable progress has been made in the Arab region towards implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. Still, the elephant in the room is that no accurate socioeconomic picture of the Arab region can be drawn without stains of conflict and violence. Wars and conflicts in the region have detrimental effects on women and girls, and advances of women and girls’ empowerment are put at risk. Schools and hospitals are destroyed, women face trafficking, enslavement, violations and sexual exploitation, forced marriages, etc.

Multi-dimensional progress has been made. 20 out of 22 countries in the region have joined the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Several countries are adopting new legislations and national laws to secure women’s rights in the labour market, to eradicate discrimination against women, and to criminalize all kinds of violence against women. Most countries have increased resources towards women’s equal educational and economic participation. Mandatory and free primary schooling has given great results, increasing the share of girls in primary education to 86%. Literacy rates among women have also increased dramatically, reaching 100% in the Gulf States and 89% for the whole region. Despite of this, political and labour participation in the region is still at the lowest levels of the world. Women earn less for the same work, are consistently under-represented at senior levels, and holds only 17% of parliament seats in the region. 35% of Arab women have suffered from physical and/or sexual violence, and 60 million Arab women and girls have been subject to genital mutilation. With these measures, one can only conclude that progress on women’s rights is evident, but remains uneven and especially vulnerable to conflict.
Ms. Shamshad Akhter, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), via video from Sendai, also stated that much progress is evident in the Asia Pacific region. There is political will and enthusiasm for ensuring gender equality and women’s empowerment in many countries, but the results are still missing. National action plans and strategies have been adopted, and violence against women criminalized. Primary education has become almost universal and gender parity achieved in the primary level. Still there is a need to discuss education quality and violence in schools. Health services for women have improved, and the region has seen a significant drop in maternal mortality while life expectancy for women has increased. More women participate in the public sector and there is a higher percentage of female leaders in both private and public sector, and female members of parliaments, even though the numbers are still low compared to other regions. There are still major gender gaps in economic participation. Gender-based violence and effects of climate change continue to give cause of concern.

Even though there has been a lot of progress in approving and adopting new legislations and policies for gender equality, Akhter underlined that the challenge now lies in the implementation and the monitoring. Priority areas are: a continued commitment to the Beijing Platform; strengthening of national capacities and national machineries; increased financing for gender equality and gender sensitive budgeting; enhancing accountability through improved data and monitoring systems; engaging more partnerships between sectors; strengthening regional cooperation, including north-south, south-south and triangular cooperation.

Mr Christian Friis Bach, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), stated that in much of the European region, the enthusiasm and political will is there, and that many countries have adopted progressive legislations and national mechanisms on promoting gender equality. In the region, primary education has become almost universal, maternal mortality has dropped, and health services for cervical and breast cancer, reproductive health and health services for youth have been improved significantly, although there are differences among countries. The region has one of the highest percentages of female members of parliament in the world, and the percentage of women participating in the labour market is high compared with other regions.

In spite of higher awareness and many improvements, there are still large gaps in terms of implementation. Challenges affecting girls and women are: increasing social pressure that causes eating disorders, psychological problems and depression; gender-based violence and sexual harassment; lack of funds for national gender equality-building mechanisms and other social services; wage gap and gender gap in pensions; vulnerable job situations and part-time work contracts; lack of access to land and credit for female entrepreneurs; inadequate data and lack of data on gender equality.

Mr Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), felt proud of the progress made in the African region since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. He emphasized that because of the African region’s relatively low base of all the indicators in the action plan, the efforts by the African countries have been relatively remarkable in many areas. The enrolment target of girls in primary education has been overachieved, maternal mortality has dropped significantly and women’s inclusion in governance and politics has risen drastically. Areas of concern are economic opportunities and social protection for girls and women in the region. Gender equality must be in the centre of the transformative debate about economic development in Africa. Women must be mainstreamed in the development discussion, and policies and legislation must change its narrative to be more technical and evidence based. To enable initiatives for a region-wide gender-mainstreaming program, new indexes and indicators must be developed and plans must be coordinated and shared.

Mr Antonio Prado, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), said that the commission has placed gender equality at the center of their work in their preparations for the Beijing+20 review process. Latin America is a diverse region, which also makes the situation of women diverse (taking into account life cycle, ethnicity, groups with special need, rural and urban). Since 1995, poverty has decreased, but
feminization of poverty has increased in the same period. The region also sees increased levels of gender-based violence, and the economic empowerment of women has been slow and uneven. Women tend to work in low productivity sectors that are most vulnerable in crisis time. Women work longer hours and are paid less than men, and they are often penalized because of maternal leave. The way forward must focus on women’s autonomy – political, physical and economic autonomy. Equality must be at the heart of the economic paradigm, social gaps must be closed and productive structures must be reformed. For the post-2015 development agenda it is important to include a solid gender perspective across the whole agenda with adequate goals, targets and indicators.

**Challenges and policy recommendations for the way forward:**

Moderator Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka noticed that all regions reported under-performance in the economic development of women. Even though all regions had had progress in legislation, there have been big gaps in the implementation. Therefore, she urged the Regional Commissions to talk about key policy recommendations for the upcoming challenges.

ESCWA stressed the need for more comprehensive legislative reviews of the action responses to the Beijing platform. National mechanisms protecting women from violence and promoting female participation in the civil society must be strengthened and effective coordination between governments and the civil society to ensure financing and the needed resources is critical.

ESCAP highlighted 5 critical action areas: Accountability for gender equality and monitoring and review must be strengthened; Greater financial investment in women’s empowerment; Researching policies for increasing women’s participation in politics, governance and employment; Establish online gender resource facilities to build capacities; Build partnerships and alliances that are inclusive and accountable across sectors.

ECE stressed the need to combat gender-based violence and discrimination, and that all countries should ratify the Istanbul Convention (The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence). More awareness for women’s rights and economic empowerment should be made, promoting women’s entrepreneurship, strengthen childcare systems, put more focus on gender taxation and gender-sensitive budgeting. Improvement of statistics and monitoring systems is critical.

ECA talked about Africa’s plan of action that calls for a transformation of the lives of women and girls - changing behaviours, cultural mentalities and norms. The emphasis must lie in the implementation, and for this, adequate financial resources and strengthened national systems for evidence-based policies are critical means of action. ECA also stressed the need to make the younger generations more active in the decision-making progress.

ECLAC focused on the need for institutions to address strategies tools and opportunities for advancement of women - exchange of experiences, development plans, planning and budgeting processes. ECLAC believes that economic empowerment of women and poverty eradication must be achieved across sectors, not only through social policies. The focus must move from areas like microcredit to the application of a gender focus in macroeconomic policies.

**Interventions by Member States:**

Several countries, including Nepal, Philippines, Thailand, Uganda Botswana and Fiji called for a stand-alone goal for gender equality and empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda, and mainstreaming of gender in all other goals through indicators on gender equality. Bahrain and Uganda, among others, expressed their wish for more mechanisms to exchange experiences between countries. Norway shared ECE’s concern for the high level of psychological problems among young girls and gender-based violence in the European region, and urged countries to stand together for the new generations. Germany encouraged countries to break gender stereotypes
that are barriers for women to live to their full potential. **Uruguay** called for more dialogue between state and civil society on the situation of marginalized women that often fall short of the policies and programs initiated. **Ukraine, Palestine, Jordan and DR Congo** addressed the causes of war and conflict that hurt women and girls’ situation and limit their rights. **Jordan** also called for countries to transform their development planning to include gender responsible budgeting.

**Concluding remarks from the regional commissions and the moderator:**

In their closing remarks, **ECA** urged Member States to be able to translate the regional commitments to the national level, and to move legislation and policies forward towards implementation, monitoring and review. **ESCAP** underlined that governments must give adequate financing for gender equality efforts, and build machineries to support women’s empowerment. **ECLAC** stressed the need for having more data as a responsibility of national governments with assistance from the Regional Commissions. **ECE** focused on the next steps forward, hoping for a FFD conference with strong emphasis on gender-based issues and a post-2015 agenda with a stand-alone goal for gender equality and adequate gender targets and indicators. **ESCWA** called for stronger political will in the region to drive the process forward.

In her closing remarks, the moderator emphasized that gender stereotypes, discriminatory norms and high tolerance for violations of the women’s rights continue, even with laws and policies for gender equality. It is important to increase the investment to close the resource gap at all levels, and data monitoring systems must be at place. In September, leaders and Heads of State will discuss how they will close the gaps and take bolder action to make sure that the Beijing platform lifts the post-2015 agenda. This response and the synergies between the two agendas will make or break the achievement of gender equality by 2030.