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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
8 March 2007

I am happy and honoured to send you my warmest wishes on International Women's Day – my first one as Secretary-General of the United Nations. I hope you will all come to know me as your representative and ally in the years ahead.

This day is an opportunity for all of us -- women *and* men -- to unite in a cause that embraces all humankind. Empowering women is not only a goal in itself. It is a condition for building better lives for everyone on the planet.

No one can dispute the evidence that this is so. And no one can gainsay the outcome of the 2005 World Summit, when leaders reaffirmed that gender equality and human rights for all are essential to advancing development, peace and security.

Yet we are still so very far from turning this understanding into universal practice. In almost all countries, women continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions. Women's work continues to be undervalued, underpaid, or not paid at all. Out of more than 100 million children who are not in school, the majority are girls. Out of more than 800 million adults who cannot read, the majority are women.

Worst of all, violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence -- yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned.

That is why International Women's Day is so important. It spells out our responsibility to work for enduring change in values and attitudes. It calls on us to work in partnership -- Governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector. It urges us to work for a transformation in relations between women and men, at all levels of society. It compels us to strengthen every means of empowering women and girls -- from education to microcredit.

The United Nations must be at the forefront of those endeavours. I pledge to do all I can to ensure that it is -- not only on International Women's Day, but *every* day. I look forward to working with you in our collective mission.