Mr. Chair, H.E. Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo (Senegal)
Distinguished Panelists and Delegates,
UN colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to introduce the report on women and development. We all know that women are central to development. There is no greater investment in the development portfolio than investing in women and girls so they can reach their potential. This is an investment to reduce poverty in all its dimensions today and for future generations.

The present report focuses on decent work, unpaid care work and social protection. It makes the case that decent work, support to unpaid care work and social protection are crucial for the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment and for inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth and development.

This is very important given the global financial and economic crisis. The report shows that decent work, support to unpaid care work and social protection have important multiplier effects across a spectrum of development goals, including poverty reduction and improved child well-being.

Now let me explain in more detail. “Decent work” involves opportunities for work that delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families. It provides workers with the freedom to organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

Yet today we see that significant gender inequalities persist in women’s access to decent work. And these inequalities include the continued and disproportionate representation of women in informal and insecure employment. They include the specific constraints faced by vulnerable groups of women as a result of discrimination and geographic location and also unequal pay for equal work.
In the last two decades, the global rate of female labour force participation has increased from 50 per cent to 52 per cent, and the male rate has dropped from 82 to 78 per cent. However, despite this improvement in female labor force participation rates, women do not benefit from increased access to decent work as most of the job gains following the crisis have been low paid, low skilled and vulnerable employment.

Now I would like to address unpaid care work. And I welcome the report of Magdalena Sepulveda, the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights that positions unpaid care work as a major human rights issue.

Today women provide most of the unpaid care work. I am talking about taking care of children and other family members, taking care of housework and household chores such collecting water and fuel, and taking care of cooking and in some cases even growing food.

And this unpaid care work constrains their ability to participate equally in education, employment and social and political life, and to earn an income commensurate with that of men.

Furthermore, while unpaid care work contributes to individual and household well-being, social development and economic growth, it often goes unrecognized and undervalued by policymakers. It is not visible in data that informs policymaking. Neither is the fact that its costs and burdens are unequally born across gender and class groupings.

Now let me turn to social protection. Social protection is concerned with preventing, managing and overcoming situations that adversely affect people’s well-being or living standards. This includes social insurance and social assistance programmes.

According to the International Labour Organization, 80 per cent of the world population lacks social protection. The economic crisis has highlighted the need for broad-based social protection measures both in reducing poverty and vulnerability, and as a counter-cyclical measure.

However, social assistance programmes should not be seen as a substitute for State investment in public services; they should be one component of a comprehensive system of social security and social services. Research shows that they often work best when they are complemented by investments in public services. They can be combined with active labour market policies, such as job search and guidance measures; facilitating apprenticeships and other ways of creating labour market exposure; skill development; and assistance in advancing or completing formal education.

Now I would like to summarize and turn to the report’s recommendations.

While more women are in paid work, there are patterns of deepened informality and vulnerability of women’s employment. Cuts to social protection and social services and austerity measures resulting from the financial and economic crisis have increased the burden of unpaid care work on women, thereby reinforcing and exacerbating existing gender inequalities.
As many leading economists have now recognized, investing in social protection measures is critical, not only to ameliorate the worst effects of the economic crises, but also to promote a robust and sustained recovery and promote sustainable livelihoods.

It is therefore encouraging to see, in this report, that many Member States are investing in efforts to promote decent work and social protection for women. These efforts include vocational and skills training to enhance women’s employability; measures to enhance rural women’s access to resources; entrepreneurship development; measures to recognise, reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid care work on women; and social protection measures.

However, much more needs to be done as pointed out in the report’s recommendations. Together we need to do three things:

First, we need to promote decent work for all segments of society and strengthen labor market regulations and social provisions to create a more level playing field for women. This can be done through measures including by enacting and enforcing minimum wage legislation, eliminating discriminatory wage practices, and promoting measures such as public work programmes.

Second, we need to conduct time-use surveys and support the use of satellite accounts to determine the value of women’s unpaid care work to the economy and to show its scope and distribution within families and communities so that policies and programmes can be created to reduce women’s disproportionate share of unpaid care work.

Third, we need to design and implement a universal, comprehensive and gender-responsive social protection system, which is complemented by accessible, quality social services and with a specific focus on ensuring access for vulnerable and marginalized groups of women.

I thank you for promoting women’s rights, empowerment and equality as goals in themselves and as essential to sustainable development and to all matters before this Committee.