landscape. And while gender continues to influence people’s choices and challenges, in many parts of the world a girl born in 2007 will probably have a brighter future than a girl born when CEDAW was adopted in 1979.

Today, women and girls have access to opportunities that were previously restricted. Primary school enrolment rates for girls have jumped and the educational gender gap is narrowing. Women are entering the labour force in greater numbers. And women’s political representation is increasing in many parts of the world.

In 2006, for instance, Chile and Jamaica elected women for the first time as their heads of government. (Chile’s president, Michelle Bachelet, is also head of state.) In addition, the Republic of Korea appointed its first woman prime minister in April 2006, bringing the total number of female heads of state or government in the world to 14.

While that number is miniscule, considering that there are 192 UN Member States, female government leadership was unheard of less than 50 years ago.

Gains in gender equality notwithstanding, far too many women and girls have been left behind and remain voiceless and powerless. Women are disproportionately affected by poverty, inequality and violence. It is widely estimated that women make up the majority of the world’s poor, comprise nearly two thirds of the people who are illiterate, and, along with children, account for 80 per cent of civilian casualties during armed conflict.

All Member States of the United Nations, regardless of their political, religious or ethnic composition, spoke with one voice when the UN pledged to make the world fit for children at the General Assembly Special Session on Children in May 2002.

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