

Remarks on International Women's Day, 8 March 2010

NGO Committee on the Status of Women Panel on Beijing + 15: Creating New Mechanisms to Accelerate the Implementation of the Platform for Action, UN, Geneva

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Gender equality architecture reform

Great advances have been made since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in 1995. More women are running and being elected to public office and have access to health services including pre-natal care. More countries have enacted laws to ensure justice for women who face violence, including intimate-partner abuse. Further, nine out of 10 girls are enrolled in primary education and are staying in school longer.¹

Despite these gains, the situation for women, young women and girls at the community level remains deplorable. Old challenges in the protection of women's rights remain, such as multiple forms of discrimination. Violence affects between 10% and 60% of all women and girls. Global poverty figures are rarely disaggregated by sex but national level data indicate that women are more likely to be poor and at risk of hunger because of the systematic discrimination they face in access to education, healthcare and control of assets.

While more women are elected, women hold just 18.2 percent of the worlds' parliamentary seats. Every year half a million women die from complications during or after birth, and over 90% of these deaths are largely preventable

¹ Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009

and occur in developing countries. Many girls' enrolled in primary school face sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination. The burden of domestic tasks also affects the quality of education girls receive.

Globally, unsafe sex is the single leading risk factor contributing to deaths among women of reproductive age. AIDS-related illness is the leading cause of death and disease among women of reproductive age in low and middle-income countries, particularly in Africa.² Three out of every five adults living with HIV in Sub Saharan Africa are women and the feminization of HIV is increasing in other regions.

So, it is clear that we are still a long way from achieving the commitments made 15 years ago at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

But as we take stock during the UN Human Rights Council and during the Beijing +15 review at the CSW 54th session, we want to seize this year as a prime opportunity for the United Nations to rekindle its galvanizing role in advancing women's empowerment and gender equality.

There are a number of important mechanisms that can be instrumental to seeing the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at country and community level.

² WHO, *Women and Health: Today's Evidence, Tomorrow's Agenda*, 2009

One is the UNAIDS Operational Plan for women, girls and gender equality that was launched last week and the other is the creation of a new UN Women's Agency.

After much negotiation, lobbying and advocacy work, the new UN Women's Entity, sometimes being called the "Gentity" was agreed by the UN General Assembly last September (2009) as part of a resolution on "system-wide coherence".

Essentially, the new UN gender entity is to reduce the current fragmentation and should create stronger coherence and coordination at all levels.

The entity would merge the four existing women and gender entities:

1. Office for the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues & the Advancement of Women (OSAGI)
2. Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
3. UNIFEM
4. INSTRAW (International Research & Training Institute)

While we are celebrating the General Assembly's resolution last September, we need to continue to press for implementation. The Secretary General submitted a "comprehensive proposal for the composite entity for gender equality and empowerment of women in January (2010). It addresses issues of the mission statement, functions, structure and operational set-up.

It proposes the establishment of an organization with both operational and normative responsibilities that would operate at the global, regional and national levels.

It would report to ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) with normative work guided by the CSW. Proposed budget is US\$500.

Currently there are governmental consultations being led by ambassadors of Estonia and Tunisia.

Challenges remain around how it should be governed and how it should work at country level as well as the practical challenges of how to merge the existing four entities.

Women's organizations including the World YWCA and GEAR Campaign recommendations on the new Gender Entity:

- Operational capacity with strong presence at country level
- Budget should be higher (GEAR campaign is calling for at least \$1 billion).
Contributions from UN for operational programmes. Give examples, e.g.
one year of military expenditure = 2928 of the new gender entity; 700 years of the UN regular budget; \$1 billion represents less than 0.5% of UN agency combined expenses in 2008
- Recruitment of USG should start now for appointment ASAP
 - global and transparent process
 - GEAR campaign has proposed criteria

- Strong leader combining global vision + gender equality expertise to lead the transition process
- Women's human rights and empowerment experience on the ground
- Fund raiser – able to secure predictable, stable funding

* Governance/board structure must ensure representation of civil society such as the UNAIDS board where NGO representatives are part.

The World YWCA is contributing to girls' and women's, including young women's, empowerment through our programmes on Violence against women, sexual and reproductive health and rights, development through livelihoods and training and education programmes, and we call for accountability and commitment by the UN system and governments for investment and implementation to keep the promises to women and girls. One of the mechanisms for this is through the new gender entity with strong leadership, resources and ability to deliver where it is needed most, at the country and community level. We need to continue to press for the new Gender Entity to be established without further delay.