

**2010 International Women's Day,
March 8th, 10:00-12:00
Palais des Nation Room XXIII**

**NGO Committee on the Status of Women event
2010 "Watershed for Women's Human Rights and
Empowerment"**

**Speaker: Navanethem Pillay,
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

Mme Pillay, welcomes the assembly and thanks them for their presence at this, the 100th anniversary of the first celebration of International Women's Day, in the 30th year since the UN's adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

In the past century and especially in the past three decades, massive achievements have been made for the promotion of women's rights; international framework has been successfully established to promote the continued establishment of equal rights for women and girls. Some of the resolutions responsible for this include:

- The 1994 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women
- Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security
- Security Council resolutions 1820, 1888, and 1889, concerning women's rights in conflict- and post-conflict situations

The progress made in the UN is being supported by countries, and mirrored on the national level. The 54th meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women conducted a 15 year review of the implementations and outcomes of the Beijing Platform for Action, and found the results positive in the areas of: education (especially primary education), employment, and participation in politics and public life. Furthermore, most countries have established national programs promoting and ensuring the advancement of women.

Despite these positive points, there is still much room for improvement. Analysis showed that nearly two out of three illiterate adults in the world are female, and unemployment rates among women are also much higher. Moreover, women are more likely to be in insecure and abusive work; these situations have been exacerbated by the financial crisis. Also worrying are the failures to achieve the Millennium Development Goals concerning women's health and mortality. While steps are being made, stereotypical gender roles predominate most cultures and countries, and we continue to see the disproportionate impact of conflict, economic crisis, and natural disaster on women.

The UPR is an excellent tool to employ in the continued study and guarantee of women's rights. The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Program of Action definitively state the inalienability of the right of women and girls, as a part of universal human rights. The UPR allows the execution of the policies and resolutions to be measured, and tracked over time.

Many steps remain to be taken to achieve the full enjoyment of rights and the end of discrimination against women on a universal level. The UPR, and the resolutions passed by the CEDAW and Security Council are an inspiration towards the accomplishment of these goals, but stronger collaborations are necessary to facilitate the fulfilment of our responsibility to end discrimination against women.

Mme Pillay thanks her audience, closes with a challenge to continue the struggle towards gender equality, and ensuring the rights of women around the world.

Speaker: Mr. Grinius Ambassador, Canada

Ambassador Grinius of Canada takes the floor and begins presentation with a report of the increasing visibility and attention paid to women's human rights in the U.N. and the reflection of this in national policies around the world.

Achievements: The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), has reached near universal ratification; the security council recognized and passed resolutions specifically to deal with the disproportionate impact of war and armed conflict on women. The UN Human Rights Council advanced the issue of women's health and safety through the UPR and other resolutions; and the Commission on the Status of Women, the MDGs, and the new Gender Entity unit all made inroads creating better status for women.

Current Efforts: In addition to these achievements, many other projects are also under way to advance the agenda of Women's Rights; Ambassador Grinius highlight those specifically being pursued by her country. Canada leads the annual HRC conference on eliminating violence against women (created by a resolution presented to the CEDAW by the country in 1994)—it will take place in June of this year. In the G8 Summit, Canada champions the cause of maternal and infant mortality, and will call on international help to improve health care for women and children in developing countries.

Opportunities: Towards the further advancement of Women's issues, the UPR presents a great asset, and challenges states under review to give closer attention to the rights of their female citizens. The ambassador advocates the inclusion of experts on women's rights in the UPR delegations, to better assess the state of women's rights, and to best encourage the integration and participation of women and women's organizations. The OHCHR plan specifically mentions the need to, "[counter] discrimination, (including) in particular...on the grounds of sex.", and the office has made efforts to mainstream women's human rights, and promote a gender perspective into national policies and programs. Finally, the newly created Gender Entity in New York provides new opportunities for consolidating efforts and streamlining the focus of initiatives to promote women's rights around the world.

In conclusion, the ambassador encourages pride in the important progress that has been made towards gender equality, and calls for the continuation and creation of new projects and initiatives towards promoting the right of women.

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

**Speaker: Natalie Fisher-Spalton
Deputy General Secretary, World YWCA**

Gender equality has made measurable international progress. Women are receiving more and better quality health care, have increased access to education (especially primary education), are more frequently running and being elected to office, and most countries have adopted legislation guaranteeing the rights of women, and protecting them from discrimination and abuse, including partner abuse.

Despite the gains made in these areas, the status of women and girls often remains deplorable on a community level. Women are more likely to be affected by unemployment, poverty, and violence. Of more concern, while health care is more available and of improving quality, half a million women continue to die annually from childbirth complications, 90% of which are preventable, and the feminization of AIDS is on the rise; in Sub-Saharan Africa an estimate 3 out of 5 adults affected by the disease are female.

The newly launched UN Gender Entity was created to help to rekindle interest and achieve the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action. The entity combines the four previously existing gender and women's rights sections (OSAGI, DAW, UNIFEM, and INSTRAW). Although merging these entities presents some challenges, it is hoped the transition will result in a cohesive body capable of implementing more streamlined and policies towards the advancement of women's rights.

Funding is of vital importance to the success of this newly created body striving to end discrimination for half of the global population. The currently miniscule budget is unacceptable, and must be increased for any measure of success to be conceivable for the Gender Entity's establishment and pro-women outreach programs.

Understanding and Acting: Women's Human Rights Mechanisms

Annelise Ebbe

Ms. Ebbe relates in her article her experience in aid work as an assistant to Ila Pathak, the President of the Indian branch of WILPF, in a refugee camp in Kandhamal district in Orissa province in 2008. Her visit to the camp followed on the heels of another wave of religious violence in the region, this time between Christians and Hindus.

In the aftermath of the attacks in more than 12,000 women were forced to live in refugee camps, after their homes and families were destroyed. The conditions of these camps were squalid, the supply chain to the camps corrupt, and little respect was shown by the government for the women's privacy, or care.

After visiting the camp, the WILPF delegation approached members of the government to amend the deplorable treatment of the refugees. Pointing to the UPR and the resolutions passed by sections of the UN, they were able to make officials see the gravity of their infractions against these women, whose rights had been violated under these terms.

Ms. Ebbe holds her experience up as a good example of the working of women's rights mechanism. The questions and information posed by the delegation in which she was a participant were able to open the dialogue within the Indian government concerning violation of the rights of their female citizens. In addition to helping to alleviate the conditions in the camps, their intervention in the situation also encouraged a wider awareness of the issue of women's human right in post-conflict areas.