

**Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Moving from Promises to Progress**  
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Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues and Friends,

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chairperson, and other members of the bureau on your election to this committee. I thank you for this opportunity to present the Note by the Secretary-General on the Activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). I want to thank, in particular, UNIFEM Consultative Committee members – representatives of Estonia, Chile, Korea, Norway and Sudan – for their guidance and support throughout the year.

Guided by its strategic plan, 2008-2013 (DP/2007/45), UNIFEM works with governments, civil society and UN partners to strengthen women's economic security and rights; end violence against women, reduce the prevalence of HIV and AIDS among women and girls and advance gender justice in democratic governance in conflict and non-conflict situations. The report before you (A/64/164) reviews results in all four areas, in support of the overall goal of supporting countries to implement commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in line with their national priorities.

Mr. Chairperson, today we are on the cusp of a new era of recognition and, we hope, action that affirms the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment to achieving development, equality and peace. Last month the General Assembly adopted a resolution on system-wide coherence (A/RES/63/311) expressing strong support for uniting the four UN gender-specific entities -- UNIFEM, OSAGI, the Division for the Advancement of Women and INSTRAW -- into one entity that is led by an under secretary-general. In the past few weeks, the Security Council adopted resolutions 1888 and 1889 requesting the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative on sexual violence and armed conflict and to submit a set of indicators for monitoring implementation, the impact of conflict on women and women's role in peace processes. The speed and effectiveness with which we move on these promises reflect the priority placed on advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

We cannot let the upcoming 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Millennium Declaration go by without committing to much more robust implementation and accountability. These are key opportunities to reflect on what has worked, and what is still needed, to advance progress.

Today, in summarizing highlights from UNIFEM's implementation of its Strategic Plan, I will cite numbers that are encouraging as well as those that cause concern. There is one overarching reality, however, that frames this presentation. The demand from countries for assistance to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in a holistic manner continues to increase exponentially, including in the context of the economic and financial crisis and the environmental and food security crises. For instance, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, which UNIFEM manages on behalf of the UN system, received nearly \$900 million in requests this year. However, to date there is only \$12 million available to the Fund to respond. It will require more determined partnerships amongst UN organizations, Member States and civil society to be able to meet growing demands to advance gender equality in all sectors – from health and education to poverty reduction and political participation.

## **I. Strengthening women's economic security and rights**

Reaching 71 countries in 2008, UNIFEM continued to respond to requests to strengthen the capacities of planning, finance and other sectoral ministries to integrate gender equality into poverty reduction and other economic policies, as well as to support efforts to engender budget and costing processes – especially in the context of public sector financial management reforms and toward achievement of the MDGs. In 2008, UNIFEM and UNDP supported national partners to strengthen gender equality commitments in seven approved poverty reduction strategies and 12 newly adopted or revised national development strategies or other policy frameworks. With the European Commission and ILO, UNIFEM is supporting multi-stakeholder groups in 12 countries to pilot indicators for tracking allocations to gender equality in the context of aid effectiveness, as a follow up to the Accra Action Agenda.

Broader and more targeted use of gender-responsive budgeting is an effective way to strengthen implementation and accountability for gender equality. In 32 countries, UNIFEM-supported gender responsive budgeting initiatives contributed to the inclusion of gender equality priorities in budget processes. In 14 of these, government and civil society initiatives produced monitoring mechanisms to track whether commitments are generating larger budgets and more effective use of resources. At local level, changes are occurring in budget allocations one community at a time. For instance, Rosario, Argentina registered more than a four-fold increase in allocations to women's empowerment programmes in 2008.

We continue to work with government, civil society and UN partners to address the specific needs of those women who are often most excluded from economic benefits and policy making. We have supported legal and policy reforms to increase women's access to decent work in Afghanistan, China, and the Republic of Moldova; continue to support networks of home-based workers to strengthen social protection in Asia; work with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and FAO to strengthen women's contributions to food security in West Africa and Central Asia; and work with countries of origin and destination in Asia and Arab States to strengthen rights and protection for migrant women workers.

An initiative that offers concrete lessons for advancing women's economic security directly is our partnership with the Government, private sector, non-governmental organizations and the World Bank in Egypt, where a Gender Equality Model is setting up a voluntary certification scheme for private firms to meet standards for hiring, training, and promoting women, as well as a healthy work environment for women. After two years, 5 of the 10 companies have already met requirements and are slated to receive a gender equality seal. This programme, built on a similar model in Latin America, has significant potential for replication in the country, in the region and worldwide.

While the number of countries that we reach and the number of partnerships formed are increasing, other numbers are less positive. The ILO estimates that 22 million more women could become unemployed as a direct result of the economic and financial crisis. In too many countries, women are denied land, property and inheritance rights, thus lacking assets needed for wealth creation. Stimulus packages, too often, are based on a male breadwinner model of the household, despite ample evidence that this is increasingly not the case.

## **II. Ending violence against women**

This Committee has assisted us to work more strategically and effectively on ending violence against women, through General Assembly resolutions produced over the past three years. The Secretary-General's Global UNiTE Campaign sends a clear message to UN partners that they must pull their weight in their particular areas of expertise. And some changes are indicative of progress. We tracked a 300 per cent increase in UN Country Teams reporting joint initiatives to support countries to end violence against women, from 26 in 2005 to 89 in 2008. Over the same period, contributions to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women have increased fivefold, although the decrease between 2008 and 2009 is disappointing. Last year, UNIFEM contributed to the Secretary-General's UNiTE Campaign by collecting more than 5 million signatures from heads of state, parliamentarians and citizens inspired to Say No to Violence against Women.

Reaching 56 countries in 2008, UNIFEM's support to end violence against women prioritized implementation of laws and policies, strengthening formal and informal justice systems as well as the security sector to respond to women's rights, and involving key actors, including men and boys and faith-based leaders. Prevention is a key focus, including as part of an initiative with UNICEF and UNFPA targeting adolescents. At the policy level, UNIFEM supported partners to secure end-violence provisions in national development and poverty reduction strategies in 5 countries; to draft and adopt laws and policies in 15 countries to address multiple forms of violence including domestic violence and female genital mutilation; and to secure justice system reforms in 4 countries.

These promising numbers are overshadowed by numbers that add up to a pandemic of staggering proportions and a response that is still much too weak. An estimated 150 million girls under 18 suffered some form of sexual violence in 2002 alone. From 100 to 140 million girls and women have experienced female genital mutilation and live with its repercussions. Over 60 million girls worldwide are child brides and 80 per cent of the 800,000 people who are trafficked annually are women and girls.

Violence against women is a worldwide pandemic, only recently emerging from the shadows. There is no global fund, no reparations, no global partnership that has the high level support and resources to even begin to chip away at the causes and consequences of this egregious abuse of women's dignity and human rights. How much longer will we wait for serious, concerted, responses?

### **III. Advancing gender justice in democratic governance**

In 70 countries, UNIFEM supports wide-ranging partnerships to advance gender-responsive good governance as a prerequisite for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, sustainable development and peace and security. Support ranges from assisting countries to take positive action to increase women's political participation, to implementation of CEDAW in legislative and constitutional review processes. As part of the UN country team, UNIFEM supported national consultative processes to secure gender-equality priorities in the constitutions finalized in five countries in 2008. In Ecuador, the new constitution included 95 per cent of women's demands, including the right of indigenous women to participate in ancestral justice processes. In 23 countries, UNIFEM tracked the use of CEDAW as the basis for legal change and supported national strategies for implementing CEDAW Committee Concluding Comments in four of these.

Security Council resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889 offer great promise but implementation has been inadequate. UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, an inter-agency partnership of which UNIFEM is a founding member, has increased technical expertise available to UN country teams and integrated missions. UNIFEM has supported women's coalitions in Afghanistan, Burundi, Darfur, Guatemala, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda and in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to develop common agendas to advocate for women's inclusion in peace processes. With the Department of Political Affairs, UNIFEM supported gender advisors to mediators and envoys to open spaces for women's participation in peace negotiations, including to the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the negotiations on northern Uganda. With UNFPA and OSAGI, UNIFEM is undertaking field-based pilots to ensure that national action plans to implement Security Council resolution 1325 can be monitored effectively. These will assist us to develop a consolidated set of indicators that can be monitored globally.

The numbers that exist and the data that remain missing, again, call on us to take action. Currently, just 24 countries have achieved or surpassed 30 per cent of women in national Parliaments. Women average under 10 per cent of members of official negotiating teams at peace talks. It is time for us all to count the numbers of women at the peace table, the numbers of women raped in war, the numbers of women human rights defenders killed for speaking out, the percentage of funds allocated to women's empowerment in post-conflict reconstruction plans. All of this counts, and we are counting.

#### **IV. Halting the spread of HIV and AIDS among women and girls**

UNIFEM works with UNAIDS and other UN partners, national AIDS councils and civil society organizations, particularly networks of HIV positive women, to secure gender-responsive policies, strategies and plans to address the pandemic. In 2008, UNIFEM contributed to the integration of gender equality and women's rights into National Strategic Plans and/or Frameworks on HIV/AIDS in 19 countries. Of the 19 countries supported in 2008, UNIFEM provided 8 National AIDS Councils with gender experts to ensure on-going technical support for the review of their National Strategic Plans. In 12 countries, UNIFEM supported policy and programme staff in national AIDS coordinating authorities to identify the specific actions required to implement gender-responsive national AIDS plans; provided support to four countries to include gender equality priorities in proposals to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria; and helped build linkages between national women's machineries and national AIDS coordinating authorities in four countries where these links were weak or nonexistent.

These efforts are contributing to a more conducive environment for addressing the gender dimensions of the pandemic, but numbers matter. Just 11 per cent of the 2 million pregnant women living with HIV have access to treatment. In fewer than 10 per cent of the 79 countries surveyed by UNAIDS in 2006 did women participate fully in developing national AIDS plans. Responses to the linkages between violence against women and HIV and AIDS and the huge number of women providing unpaid care in families and communities struck by HIV and AIDS remain absent in too many national AIDS strategies.

#### **V. Making the numbers count**

Addressing the flagrant abuse of women's human rights, persistent gender discrimination, and the potential of billions of girls and women to fully contribute to development equality and peace requires coordinated action. In 2008 UNIFEM expanded its participation in UN coordination and reform processes at all levels, engaging in 72 joint programmes, 54 as participating agency and 18 as lead agency. The UN system is increasingly working together at all levels to address the causes and consequences of gender inequality, from inter-agency initiatives on sexual violence, trafficking and female genital mutilation to the increasing number of UN Gender Theme Groups active in UN Country Teams and to Regional Coordination Mechanisms like the one on gender equality co-chaired by UNESCAP and UNIFEM. The UNDG has agreed to a common set of performance indicators on gender equality that a growing number of UN Country Teams are using, along with the ILO Gender Audit Methodology, to establish a baseline against which to measure change.

The gaps and challenges identified in the Secretary General's paper in support of the General Assembly debate on strengthening the gender architecture pertain to efforts to advance gender equality across the UN and at regional, country and local levels. Without significantly changing the positioning, authority, coordination and the resources available to those who drive the gender equality agenda – whether coalitions of women's organizations, national women's machineries or the four gender-specific UN entities – these gaps will continue to impede progress. As UNIFEM found in its latest volume of *Progress of the World's Women*, strong voices and drivers demanding implementation of promises made are essential to building accountability. This General Assembly has an unparalleled opportunity to forge new institutional arrangements for enhancing support to countries to advance gender equality and to help realize the vision embodied in the Millennium Declaration.

As the countdown begins to the 2015 target, demand for expertise and support to gender equality and women's empowerment is increasing. Women are watching. We appreciate the partnership and support we have received from UN Member States and look forward to continuing to work together to implement commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in order to assist all countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.