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*Please check against delivery*

Colleagues and friends

It is a great pleasure and honour to visit Grailville and to make a presentation at this International General Assembly. I very much appreciated the opportunity to be present during your impressive presentations on your work at national and regional levels as well as the networking you have established on critical issues. I hope that I can make a contribution to your important discussions by providing a global context and offering some reflections on the way forward for the United Nations and other stakeholders working to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in all parts of the world.

My perspective is that of the global policy and normative arena. The Division for the Advancement of Women, where I work, services the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the global policy-making body on gender equality, as well as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the treaty body monitoring women's human rights. It is responsible for the follow-up to the *Beijing Platform for Action*. We are also concerned with how this policy and normative framework is used at regional, national and local levels to bring about concrete change. The Division works with Governments, through its small technical assistance programme, to enhance the capacity to implement the commitments made through the *Platform for Action* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*.

A historical perspective is required to be able to fully comprehend the mandates established, the efforts made and the achievements and remaining gaps and challenges, as well as to identify the most effective way forward. I will not be able to provide a comprehensive historical overview here, but I will make available a paper which provides information on the history of the work of the United Nations on gender equality and empowerment of women.

**The global vision**

The vision for gender equality and empowerment of women was first established at global level in the *United Nations Charter* in 1945, which declared faith "in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal

rights of men and women and of nations large and small...” This reference to gender equality already at the founding of the United Nations was reportedly largely the result of intensive lobbying by women delegates and representatives of the 42 non-governmental organizations accredited to the founding conference of the United Nations.

The Charter in 1945 did not provide specific details of the changes required to ensure the fundamental rights of both women and men, but this has been clearly elaborated over the past six decades through the policy and normative efforts of the United Nations. One recent expression of the vision for a more gender-equal world was put forward by the Taskforce on the Millennium Development Goal on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. The taskforce called for *“a world in which men and women work together as equal partners to secure better lives for themselves and their families. In this world, women and men share equally in the enjoyment of their capabilities, economic assets, voice, and freedom from fear and violence. They share the care of children, the elderly and the sick; the responsibility for paid employment; and the joys of leisure. In such a world, the resources now used for war and destruction are instead invested in human development and well-being; institutions and decision-making processes are open and democratic; and all human beings treat each other with respect and dignity.”*

There have been significant achievements in moving towards this goal since 1945 - in many ways the world is a very different and better place for women and girls than in 1945. Nevertheless, gender equality and empowerment of women have not been given the systematic and sustained priority attention needed to achieve the vision of the *United Nations Charter*. While a clear global policy and human rights framework on gender equality and empowerment of women has been established, which guides the efforts of Governments and other actors, the rhetoric is still much better than the practice. In recent years, even some of the agreements already reached have been threatened and there is a risk that global policy gains in important areas, such as reproductive health, could be eroded.

Over the past six decades, considerable efforts have been made to promote gender equality and empowerment of women by the United Nations as an organization, by individual Member States, and by other actors, in particular non-governmental organizations and civil society groups. The United Nations has played a significant role, particularly in the promotion and protection of the human rights of women, the development of policy recommendations in critical areas, the compilation and dissemination of information and statistics, and the monitoring of progress. It has also provided an important political space where critical policy discussions and decision-making have taken place. This year the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women commemorated its 60<sup>th</sup> year of work and its 50<sup>th</sup> session.

Pressure from civil society and non-governmental organizations has been a crucial factor in ensuring that Member States comply with international agreements. The world conferences on women increased the voice of the women’s organizations in shaping the global efforts on gender equality and empowerment of women. Women’s groups and

networks have played a major role in energizing debates and increasing the visibility of gender equality issues at global and regional levels, as well as ensuring action and concrete achievements at national level.

The actions required to ensure the fundamental rights of both women and men were clearly elaborated through the world conferences on women organized by the United Nations between 1975 and 1995. The *Beijing Platform for Action*, adopted at the Fourth World Conference in Beijing in 1995, involved a major breakthrough in several respects. It clearly established the responsibility of governments for promoting equality between women and men and endorsed an explicit human rights perspective and a strong focus on the empowerment of women. There was also an increased focus on the need for changes in attitudes and behaviour of men and boys in support of gender equality and empowerment of women.

The global human rights framework is well established. The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* was adopted in 1979, and entered into force in 1981. Today 183 States have ratified the treaty. The Convention addresses the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of women, in both public and private spheres of life. Both direct and indirect discrimination is prohibited in the convention, including laws, policies or programmes and conduct which may appear to be gender-neutral, but nonetheless have detrimental effects on women. The Convention requires not only the development of an adequate legal framework but also attention to its effective implementation. The Convention has been an inspiration for women in all parts of the world. It has had a positive impact on legal and policy development, leading to significant change at national level – in constitutions, legislation and in courts. The Convention has also been effectively utilized by NGOs as a benchmark for assessing the situation of women and as a tool for advocacy and activism.

Achievement of the goal of gender equality and empowerment of women requires systematic and sustained priority attention in all policy areas. Gender mainstreaming, which was identified in the *Beijing Platform for Action* as a major strategy, requires that the contributions, priorities and needs of women as well as men are considered - through gender analysis - in the beginning of planning processes, in order to influence the direction of development, so that both women and men can be involved and benefit. Gender mainstreaming is the means by which policies, strategies, plans and resource allocations in all areas - political, economic, socio-cultural, environmental - can be influenced from a gender equality perspective. Gender mainstreaming ensures that the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women is the responsibility of all actors, rather than the sole responsibility of gender specialists. It is important to note, however, that gender mainstreaming does not mean that there is no need for specific activities focused on women. Such specific actions remain very critical, given the remaining gaps and challenges to gender equality and empowerment of women.

Despite the official commitment to gender mainstreaming - most recently expressed by Heads of State in the 2005 World Summit - the separateness or marginalization of much of the work to promote gender equality and empowerment of

women remains a major problem. Excellent work on women and gender equality in many different areas, such as health, education, and employment, remains on the margins and has limited impact on important processes of policy development, resource allocation and programme design and implementation. As result, such efforts have little success in effectively bringing about needed changes in policies and programmes, and thus limited concrete impact on the ground.

The challenge I put before you in this presentation is: How can we use the important instruments we have – the *Platform for Action* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* - more effectively at national and local levels to bring about positive change for women and girls? The policies and norms developed at global level, and adopted by Member States of the United Nations - your Governments, should influence the policies, planning, resource allocations and actions at national level; which should positively affect policies, planning, resource allocations and actions at local level; which in turn should lead to concrete changes in the lives of women and girls on the ground. The question we should ask ourselves is what we can do to ensure this happens.

### **Ten year review of progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action**

In 2005 a review of implementation of the *Platform for Action* was carried out in the Commission on the Status of Women. Around the world, governments, regional organizations, NGOs and civil society groups and networks, reviewed progress over the past decade. Although positive changes were noted in many areas, such as policy changes and legislative reforms, the review clearly indicated that the *Platform for Action* remains far from being fully implemented. Important gains were noted in all twelve priority areas identified in the *Platform for Action*, but serious gaps and challenges also remained in each of these areas. Progress had been very uneven - across and within all regions and countries. In many areas women still face multiple discrimination on grounds of race, class, ethnic group, disability, and in some areas the effects of existing gender inequalities are increased by HIV/AIDS, poverty or armed conflict.

Positive developments noted included the fact that policies and strategies for gender equality have now been developed in almost all countries and that a range of mechanisms have been established at national level to promote and monitor gender equality (such as women's ministries, gender equality commissions, ombudspersons offices and parliamentary networks). In addition, countries have increased adherence to international and regional human rights mechanisms, such as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW). Increased efforts are being made to engage men and boys in the work for gender equality and empowerment of women.

However, even though significant gains have been made in these areas, there is still much room for improvement. Many excellent policies and strategies on gender equality and empowerment of women are not fully implemented; mechanisms put in place to promote gender equality and empowerment of women may have unclear

mandates, limited resources and little access to real power; implementation of treaties ratified is not given sufficient priority at national level; and in some cases attempts to engage men have been misunderstood and mistrusted by the women's movement, sometimes because they have actually shifted the focus from women's advancement to protecting male privileges.

There have been some significant advances for women in many parts of the world in relation to health, education and employment. Even in these areas, however, there are still grounds for continued concern. For example, in many countries the gains made in terms of improved access of girls and women to education have not empowered women or translated into benefits in terms of increased employment opportunities. While access to health services has improved in many countries, in many other countries women lack even the most basic reproductive health care; and around the world many women-specific health needs and priorities go un-addressed, in part because health research in most countries is still based on men. In some cases, women's increased access to employment is only to work of a part-time nature, occupational segregation persist, and women's wages remain less than men's.

Many serious gaps and challenges to gender equality and empowerment of women remain in other areas, for example the persistence of violence against women; the serious under-representation of women in decision-making; the continuation of discriminatory laws governing marriage, land, property and inheritance; the fact that women continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, and the devastating effects of conflict on women, particularly sexual violence. In addition, new challenges for women's empowerment and gender equality have emerged over the past decade, such as combating the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS; effectively addressing trafficking in women and girls; and mobilizing the new information and communication technologies (ICT) in support of gender equality and women's empowerment. Your presentations focused on many of these gaps and challenges as you have experienced them at national and local levels.

### **Critical challenges to be urgently addressed**

I would like to single out a number of critical challenges identified in the review process which need urgent attention in all regions and countries around the world. Gender-based violence, for example, is a serious development constraint that inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men. The Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women, to be presented to the General Assembly this autumn, highlights the enormity of the problem in all regions of the world. It cuts across all geographic, class, wealth, age, racial, ethnic and political divides. Women in all contexts can be subjected to violence. Violence against women requires a comprehensive response from Governments, which includes actions to prevent violence, prosecute and punish perpetrators and provide remedies and relief to victims.

Gender-based violence is exacerbated in conflict and its aftermath. Over the past decade women and girls have become prime targets of armed conflict and suffered its impact disproportionately; particularly as gender-based and sexual violence have become weapons of warfare. As the majority of the world's refugees and internally displaced persons, women and children are also vulnerable to violence, even in refugee camps. Even in that most vulnerable of situations – as displaced persons or refugees and in what should be a safe space – women and girls are exposed to violence. The vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS in many parts of the world, and particularly in Africa, can be directly linked to the relations between women and men, as well as to persistent stereotypes about what is appropriate and acceptable behaviour for women and men in relation to reproduction and sexuality. Violence against women increases the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS, including by removing their possibilities to negotiate safe sexual relationships. As a result, many women and girls live in intolerable environments of fear – fear of the violence itself and fear of the consequences of not being able to make demands and protect themselves.

Women remain seriously underrepresented in all areas of public life. In many areas it is not even possible to get reliable statistics on women's participation, which is, in itself, an indication that little importance is given to increasing women's representation. The representation of women in Parliaments globally stands at a dismal 16 percent. The progress made has been far too slow. In high-level positions in economic bodies in both the public and private sectors, in the judiciary, in academia, in international organizations, including the United Nations and major NGOs, and in the media, women's representation is very low, even in developed countries. Many of the gains that have been made in increasing the representation of women in public life can be attributed to affirmative action, such as quotas, established in constitutions, by legislation or through temporary special measures. Experience shows that targets do work; although incentives as well as sanctions for non-compliance are often needed to ensure their effectiveness. Experience has also shown that broader participation of women at local levels of decision-making may be an important first step toward women's meaningful participation at the national level. It is important to note, however, that the local context is not always inherently more democratic or more open to women's involvement than national or international levels. Considerable specific support is required to ensure that women can participate effectively. Where such support is provided, the benefits can be great.

Increasing the numbers of women in organizations is not enough to bring about changes in how organizations work and the gender sensitivity of outcomes. Increasing women's impact on policy formulation and implementation, through explicitly advancing an agenda for gender equality, is critical. Women need real opportunities to influence the agendas, institutions and processes of decision-making. Existing values, norms, rules, procedures and practices within organizations can restrict women's potential to participate fully. Environments can disadvantage and discourage women, through, for example, discriminatory attitudes and practices and lack of attention to mechanisms which support a balance between family and work responsibilities for both women and men.

Unequal sharing of family responsibilities has implications for women's access to education, employment, training opportunities and participation in voluntary activities. It has also major implications for women wanting to take on public office, particularly where election processes require candidates to devote a significant amount of time to campaigning, which may involve traveling outside of their home areas for extended periods of time. In many contexts, women are disadvantaged as they cannot devote as much time to these activities as their male counterparts because family responsibilities are not equally shared between women and men. The environments of institutions are not always conducive to women's participation, because meeting schedules do not take into account family obligations which are largely women's responsibility. Change in this area is, however, happening slowly. In some contexts, there has been a positive shift in involvement of men in family life over one generation, with benefits for women and children and men themselves. Men are increasingly taking greater responsibility for child care, and indeed in some countries have come to demand the opportunity to do so.

Attitudes towards gender equality and the empowerment of women among the general public and within bureaucracies have not changed at the same pace as policy, legal and institutional frameworks over the past decades. This is one of the main reasons why practice does not match rhetoric and policy commitments. Stereotypical attitudes and practices are working to the disadvantage of women and girls in all areas of society – in families, educational institutions, religious institutions, cultural institutions, sporting organizations, workplaces, political bodies and in the media.

Addressing stereotypes will require an explicit focus on men and boys. There is increased understanding that gender equality is not only important for women and girls but should also be a concern for men and boys. The attitudes and behaviour of men and boys can have significant impact on the lives and well-being of women and girls. In many areas of the world, these impacts are far from positive, including in relation to violence, harassment in the workplace and other areas – such as schools and sports arenas, and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. In many countries around the world, however, men have mobilized in groups and networks to support, for example, campaigns to eliminate violence against women.

### **The context in which we work today**

At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders declared that progress for women is progress for all, noted that women are disproportionately affected by many of the problems demanding world attention, such as poverty, HIV/AIDS and armed conflicts, and reiterated their resolve to eliminate discrimination against women. None of this was new – it has all been said before. The commitments made at the World Summit were, however, critically important because they were not made by Ministers for Women's Affairs but by Heads of State. This commitment of Heads of State should provide an important new opportunity to enhance the focus on gender equality at national level and lead to real change on the ground in the lives of women and girls. Fully utilizing this

opportunity will, however, require that the main challenges and obstacles facing the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women today are recognized and addressed.

The major challenge today is the huge gap between policy and action. Because of the strong development of policies and legal norms over the past six decades, in many areas the actions required are already well known. New policy recommendations are not needed in most areas. This is not to say that there is not a need to continue to move policy development forward and come-up with new recommendations. However, policy recommendations do not bring about change unless they are implemented at national and local levels. The urgent challenge today is ensuring effective implementation of the existing very solid set of recommendations we have. For this reason, the Declaration adopted by Member States at the ten-year review in 2005 did not elaborate on new actions but called for accelerated implementation of the existing global policy framework, the *Platform for Action*.

A further major challenge is the changed global political climate since 1995. This has meant that it has been difficult to push for new policy changes and even to maintain the policy advances already made in some areas. It is fair to say that many of the gains made in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 could not have been achieved today in the existing political environment. There have instead been attempts at global level to roll back commitments already made, particularly in the area of sexual and reproductive health and women's rights. Similar types of political backlash have also been reported at national level in some areas which seriously hinders implementation.

Another serious concern is the lack of explicit commitment and leadership on gender equality and empowerment of women in top and middle-level management in Governments and important organizations at all levels, including the United Nations and NGOs. This sends a strong signal that – despite many positive policy statements made - gender equality and empowerment of women is not important in the work of these bodies and organizations. This is a message which is quickly picked up and leads to inaction on gender equality.

The gap between policy and practice at national level is due to both the lack of full commitment by Member States and the failure of the United Nations and other external partners to deliver the type of support required in operational work. There is an urgent need for change within the United Nations. The need to increase implementation at national level must be the starting point in the reform of the gender equality work of the United Nations. All responsibility for gender equality cannot be left to the gender-specific entities within the United Nations, such as the Division for the Advancement of Women in which I work, UNIFEM, INSTRAW or the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, or even to one large body on gender equality which is a model being proposed by some. All parts of the United Nations system, whether working on peace and security, development, humanitarian emergencies, human rights, are expected to give attention to women and gender equality in their work. Their responsibility in this area, as part of gender mainstreaming, must be reinforced and they must be held fully



accountable for ensuring that implementation of the *Platform for Action* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* is accelerated.

To move forward, we need to make full use of mechanisms that have proven useful or have potential for even greater impact. I refer here in particular of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* which is a critical accountability mechanism, but also the Commission on the Status of Women, whose full potential has never been fully realized. ( I will comeback to discuss this further later in the presentation).

Galvanizing new broad-based coalitions for gender equality and empowerment of women outside the women's movement, such as the vibrant movements on social development and the environment, can strengthen women's voices, provide access to new resources, and lead to strategic alliances in advocating for policy change.

The Millennium Development Goals (Goal 3 is focused on gender equality and empowerment of women) have effectively mobilized Governments, international organizations and NGOs at national level and enhanced the focus on implementation and reporting. Although attention to gender equality in the goals focused on poverty, education, health, HIV/AIDS, environment and solidarity has not been adequate to date, the Millennium Development Goals can also provide important new opportunities for increasing the visibility of gender issues in national development planning and reporting, developing new alliances and increasing access to resources.

An important aspect of developing new momentum for change and working to close the gap between policy and practice must be to strengthen the work at local community levels, through non-governmental organizations and other groups and networks. As well as significant achievements at policy level over the past decades, there have also been critical processes of change initiated at local levels – your presentations very well illustrated this. The combination of change from the top, and actions and demands from below, is needed to ensure that sufficient pressure is placed on the critical organizations which have power and resources to speed up implementation – such as governments and international and regional organizations, including the United Nations.

### **How can civil society help accelerate implementation**

The work of the United Nations on policy and normative development has been critical for the advances that have been made over the past decades. It is important for NGOs to continue to be engaged in this process, as the Grail Linkage Group has already been doing very effectively. However, it is perhaps even more critical at this point in time to increase efforts to ensure that the policy and normative frameworks already in place lead to increased change at national and local levels in combating the discrimination women and girls face around the world. Governments – in particular political leaders - have the main responsibility, but non-governmental organizations and community groups can and should play a critical role in keeping attention on the issue and demanding

accountability from Governments. NGOs can also demand accountability from the United Nations, both at operational level and at regional and global levels.

*Supporting implementation of CEDAW at national level*

The value of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* has not always been sufficiently recognized as a critical accountability mechanism for gender equality and empowerment of women. When countries ratify the Convention, they assume specific obligations. States parties are expected to include the principle of equality of women and men in their constitutions, and to realize this principle in practice through laws and other means in both public and private spheres. A major strength of the Convention is the fact that States Parties are required to report on a regular basis. When States parties present their reports, their representatives meet with the Committee for a constructive dialogue on progress in implementing the Convention at national level. The Committee prepares a set of recommendations on action needed to improve the implementation of the Convention (called "concluding comments"). This set of recommendations, specifically tailored for the individual States parties, is a very unique instrument that could be used more systematically and effectively at national level by governments, parliaments, civil society and by the United Nations and external donors.

Many NGOs focus solely on the reporting process, by contributing to the official report or by preparing shadow reports. Not enough systematic attention is given to advocating for and monitoring the implementation of the set of tailored concrete recommendations prepared by the Committee. This set of recommendations for each country should be the basis for work of all actors, including civil society. Greater efforts are needed to disseminate these very broadly, including by translating them into local languages. They must be taken to the local level – made meaningful for local women and girls, and used as effectively as possible to bring about change.

*Increased contributions to the CSW and dissemination and use of outcomes*

A great deal of focus of NGOs in relation to the Commission on the Status of Women has been on participation in the annual sessions and developing ways to influence delegates of Member States during the Commission. While this remains critical work, there is a need for Governments, the United Nations and NGOs, consider new ways and means to spread information on the global processes to civil society groups and networks at national and local levels, particularly on the recommendations for action.

Many NGOs will never be able to attend the sessions in New York. It is important that a broad group of NGOs and women's groups and networks in all regions are informed and supported to be engaged and participate in whatever ways possible in the work of the United Nations for/women. One way to do this, if they have access to internet, is through the on-line discussions organized by the Division on the Advancement of Women on the priority themes in the Commission on the Status of Women each year. (Please see the separate information note). It is important to ensure

that women at local level have the opportunity to know what gains have been made in terms of recommendations or rights and how they might use these. Important elements in outcomes of the Commission can be translated into local languages and made available to women at local levels. Ways to support women to use them in their daily lives can be developed.

All NGOs attending the Commission could increase the dissemination and effective utilization of the recommendations in their day-to-day work, and in this way contribute to significantly increasing the impact of the Commission. In this context, I would like to mention one good practice example developed by the Anglican Observer to the United Nations. Over the past two years, large groups of Anglican women from around the world have participated in the Commission. A preparatory programme was offered prior to their arrival in New York and regular meetings held to guide them through the process once they arrived. Efforts are also being made to ensure that the learnings from their participation are incorporated into their work and lives on their return to their home countries. I believe this is an excellent practice which could be replicated by other organizations.

In adopting new working methods at its recent 50<sup>th</sup> session, the Commission on the Status of Women increased its focus on reviewing progress at national level and facilitating the sharing of ideas, experiences, lessons learned and good practices during its annual sessions. Since the Commission has a programme of work already mapped out for the coming three years, it is possible for NGOs to plan activities in advance around the work of the Commission, both for/with women who will attend the Commission and those who cannot. The Commission will focus on one priority theme in the coming three years: the elimination of all forms of violence against the girl child in 2007; financing gender equality in 2008; and the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS in 2009. NGOs could investigate whether they could focus on these themes in their on-going work during the coming three years.

The Commission will also revisit earlier commitments on other themes during the coming three years, to assess implementation of the recommendations made: the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality in 2007 (which was discussed by the Commission in 2004); women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peacebuilding in 2008 (discussed by the Commission in 2004); and the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels in 2009 (discussed in 2006). NGOs could also review progress in their countries in the implementation of the recommendations in these areas.

### **The context of the Grail**

In closing, I would like to offer some suggestions that might stimulate discussion on the specific role of the Grail. The contributions of Grail members as individuals are important. At the very least, all Grail members need to be clear about the vision for a gender-equal world and work to ensure that it is achieved in their own "worlds". All the

work of the Grail can be said to be promoting, both directly and indirectly, greater equality between women and men and empowerment of women – as your presentations yesterday illustrated. The Grail is already very active in the context of the United Nations through the Linkage Group, in particular in areas of social justice, and has made an impact in debates, for example, on financing for development and globalization and in the formulation and implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

More recently, the Grail in the Bronx involved young women in the discussions on the girl child in preparation for the theme of the Commission in 2007. This provides an example of the way in which Grail members and groups in other parts of the world could engage with the work of the United Nations more actively. Girls could be informed about the work of the Commission and encouraged to participate in the on-line discussion being organized from 14 August to 8 September. Discussion groups could be set up and other ways informing and engaging girls (and boys) identified. It would be important not only to organize activities prior to the Commission, but to continue the engagement after the session, using the outcomes adopted by the Member States to support girls to make changes in their lives, as well as to increase awareness among boys and encourage them to support the empowerment of girls. The Working Group on Girls of the NGO Committee in UNICEF is planning to translate some of the official reports for the session into "child-friendly" documents. This could be an invaluable resource.

Since the Grail works directly with women at local levels in many parts of the world, there is a tremendous opportunity to address one of the great failings in the past decade, women's under-representation in decision-making. The consequences of this under-representation are devastating for women themselves, but also contribute to the failings in relation to democracy, governance, transparency and accountability, transformation, and have direct and indirect linkages to some of the problems identified by national Grail groups for discussion at this General Assembly. Grail programmes which focus on development of women's leadership at local levels could make a significant contribution. This could build on earlier work of the Grail in South Africa and other countries on transformative participatory development, as well as the work of the Grail on women's leadership in many other countries, such as Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Brazil. The clear commitment to young women in the area of leadership is a positive contribution of the Grail. Your network on the Young Women of the Americas is a good practice example in this area.

Knowing that the Grail works in many different sectors and in a wide variety of arenas, Grail groups could, as relevant, increase their focus on some of the other critical challenges discussed earlier, such as engaging men and boys in gender equality work, addressing gender stereotypes in many different contexts, and working to combat violence against women. In the case of violence against women, I would like to encourage the Grail to use the study of the Secretary-General when it is released later this autumn to spread information and increase engagement of a broad range of stakeholders in all parts of the world in this critical work. I know that the Grail in Holland, for example, is engaged in work on trafficking. The report of the Secretary-General, which will be available in six languages – English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and

Arabic – and which contains many examples of good practices and concrete recommendations, may be useful in this work. A group of NGOs were actively engaged in the preparatory process for the study and are planning to work systematically in its follow-up. Increased networking among NGOs will increase the effectiveness of these efforts.

In closing I wish to emphasize again that the challenge facing us is to ensure accountability for implementation of existing policy recommendations - in order that the goals of the *Beijing Platform for Action* and the obligations under the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* can be achieved in the coming decade, leading to increased positive impact on the lives of women and girls around the world. I know the Grail is fully committed to these goals. I hope that I have been able to stimulate some ideas for new strategies. I look forward to hearing about the outcome of this General Assembly and about your future work in this area.

Thank you.