

GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER JUSTICE

Statement by

Carolyn Hannan, Director

Division for the Advancement of Women

United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)

At the 23rd General Assembly of the

Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CONGO)

Geneva, 7 December 2007

I would like to thank CONGO for the opportunity to make a contribution to the discussion during this 23rd General Assembly on the critical issue of equality and justice. I am especially grateful for the opportunity to discuss equality and justice in relation to women and men – gender equality and gender justice - which is critical for achievement of equality and justice in all other contexts. I thank in particular the President of CONGO, Renata Blom, who has consistently shown strong support to the issue of gender equality and gender justice.

Gender equality and gender justice is critical for the other key themes being considered this morning: peace and human security, human development and climate change – environmental crises, and human rights. It has important implications for the issues that will be discussed this afternoon – violence, resources and vision and responsibility.

Commitments to gender equality and gender justice

The United Nations has established strong mandates for gender equality and gender justice. At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders reiterated that “progress for women is progress for all”. Five years earlier, at the Millennium Summit in 2000, world leaders acknowledged that gender equality and empowerment of women are essential for the eradication of poverty and hunger and for development that is truly sustainable. One of the eight Millennium Development Goals established, following the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, is focused on gender equality and empowerment of women.

Since 1995 and the adoption of gender mainstreaming as a critical strategy for achieving gender equality, intergovernmental bodies – such as the General Assembly, the ECOSOC and the Commission on the Status of Women - have worked to mainstream gender perspectives as an integral part of all policy areas. It is increasingly recognized at policy level that achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women is critical for the achievement of all other development goals, and thus cuts across, or is essential for, progress on all other issues and sectors.

The United Nations can be proud of its achievements in relation to its normative and policy work in establishing mandates and securing global commitments on gender equality and gender justice. A strong global policy framework – the Beijing Declaration

and Platform for Action – has been in place since 1995 to guide work at national level. The human rights treaty on gender equality – the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – has been ratified by 185 States, and its Optional Protocol by 90 States.

The strong mandates and norms at global level are the result of the focus in the United Nations on gender equality and empowerment of women since its establishment. A separate body was created already in 1946 to work on the “advancement of women”. The Commission on the Status of Women worked from its inception to collect and compile data on women’s situation around the world, to promote women’s human rights and raise awareness of, and support for, their contribution to development. The Decade for Women (1976-1985) and four world conferences on women (between 1975 and 1995) contributed significantly to raising awareness and commitment to gender equality and gender justice. The establishment of gender mainstreaming as a critical strategy in the Platform for Action in 1995 was an important breakthrough as it required attention to gender equality and empowerment of women in all sectors. At the intergovernmental level this meant, importantly, that promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women was no longer considered the exclusive responsibility of the Commission on the Status of Women. Other intergovernmental bodies were also responsible for taking gender perspectives into account in their work – including the General Assembly, the ECOSOC and its functional commissions and the Security Council. Governments were required to give attention to gender perspectives in all sector areas. All United Nations entities were given clear mandates to mainstream gender perspectives into all areas of their work.

The reality on the ground

While much has been achieved at the policy and normative level, the situation is quite different if implementation on the ground is assessed. The very positive policy rhetoric has not translated into the necessary changes in practice. The ten-year review of implementation of the Platform for Action in 2005 revealed a huge gap between global policies and norms and actions at national level. Member States have not lived up to their commitments, and the United Nations has failed to deliver the necessary support to the Member States. The positive outcomes of the work at global level is not having the intended impact on the ground.

There are many reasons why, despite the strong mandates at global level, progress in implementation has been so slow. These include the fact that the important strategy of gender mainstreaming has not been fully understood and there have been few serious attempts at implementation – both within UN entities and Member States. Despite global commitments, there has not been sufficient political will and leadership in top and middle-level management has been lacking. Mechanisms for holding managers accountable for gender equality commitments have not been established and insufficient resources have been allocated.

Over and above these institutional factors, an equally important element in the failure to implement is the issue of attitudes. An honest assessment reveals that there is still a strong feeling among many decision-makers within the United Nations and in Member States, that gender equality and gender justice is “just not that important”. As a result, it is often left to gender equality specialists – who are almost always women, often at junior level with little decision-making power, and inevitably under-resourced and lacking strong and visible management support.

A common response to the efforts of gender equality specialists to bring attention to gender perspectives in different areas/issues is that the more important work on policy development and planning must be taken care of first, before attention can be given to issues of gender equality and gender justice. This illustrates a lack of understanding that gender equality has implications for policy development and planning in the areas/issues being considered.

Similarly, participants coming to a meeting such as this one, often immediately dismiss the option of participating in events on gender equality because they are considered only of interest to women and/or gender specialists; of no relevance to their areas of work; or not as important as other issues on the agenda. While many recognize the importance of the broader concepts of “equality” and “justice”, once these concepts are focused specifically on “gender” – “gender equality” and “gender justice” – they are not considered as important. What is missing is an understanding of the essential linkages between gender equality and empowerment of women and progress for all other areas/issues. The critical messages reiterated by world leaders in 2000 and 2005 – that gender equality and empowerment of women is essential for progress in other areas, and that progress for women is progress for all – have not been fully understood and acted upon.

One other factor, increasingly recognized as critical to the lack of understanding of the importance of, and commitment to, implementation of gender equality and empowerment of women, is the persistence of stereotypes on the roles, capabilities and contributions of women and men. These stereotypes have negative implications for women all around the world. The consequences for women in many developing countries are highly visible and often have devastating impacts on day-to-day life and survival. For women in developed countries, they may be less visible but can also have serious consequences, for example in the context of violence against women or under-representation in decision-making in many areas.

Stereotypes result in lack of recognition of gender equality and empowerment of women as important for development. This is not only problematic within governments or in the United Nations. Failure to recognize gender inequality and injustice, and to take steps to explicitly address it, is also a problem in many non-governmental organizations, academic organizations, professional associations and in the media. Not surprisingly, gender inequality and injustice can be serious issues within these organizations themselves. Many organizations which have failed to take up gender equality issues in

their work have organizational cultures which also do not promote gender equality and gender justice within the organizations.

Consequences of lack of implementation

The consequences of the failure to explicitly address gender inequality and gender injustices are devastating for women and girls. Some of these include: serious levels of violence against women - in domestic contexts as well as in situations of armed conflict - which is disempowering and life threatening; trafficking, a modern form of slavery and torture; high levels of maternal mortality – often because of inaccessible health services due to lack of basic transport - which is unacceptable in the age of space travel; lack of access to the basic requirements for survival, such as land, property and economic resources, and unequal access to education and employment; and under-representation in all areas of decision-making. Just to give some quick examples, in 2007 only 16 percent of parliamentarians world-wide are women and there are no reliable statistics for women’s participation in any other area. In many countries, even developed countries, representation of women as heads of universities is less than 10 percent. In Norway, the percentage of women in corporate boards was so low that the Government recently threatened to legislate unless there was a significant improvement.

These facts illustrate that the human rights of women and girls in many parts of the world are systematically violated. Any serious development thinker/practitioner would have to recognize that this is not just devastating for individual women and their families but extremely serious for the achievement of the whole development agenda, and the achievement of universal human rights and peace and security.

What is being done to rectify this situation

The Commission on the Status of Women has been working on gender equality and empowerment of women for over 60 years. Since the Fourth World Conference in Beijing in 1995, the Commission has revised its working methods to ensure that it can both carry out effective policy-making and promote and monitor implementation at national level. The Commission has an important role as a global forum for exchange and sharing of experiences, lessons learned and good practices. Considerable progress has been made. Member States increasingly share both achievements and gaps and challenges and the Commission is recognized as an important learning forum.

Since 2006, the Commission focuses on policy-making in relation to one priority theme and one emerging issue, selected to allow for greatest impact on other work of the United Nations. It also reviews implementation of policy recommendations adopted at earlier sessions to strengthen its focus on the impact of its policy outcomes at national level. The efforts of the Commission over the past five to six years have illustrated that, although it is not an accountability mechanism, the Commission can be very effective, through the use of interaction and exchange at its annual sessions, in support of national level implementation.

The Commission works to ensure it can influence the work of other parts of the United Nations through the choice of themes for its annual sessions; by explicitly transmitting its outcomes to other bodies; and by seeking opportunities to collaborate directly with other bodies. For example, with regard to the 2008 session, the Commission chose the priority theme “Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women” to influence the follow-up to the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for development in 2008. The emerging issue: “Gender perspectives on climate change” was chosen to influence the follow-up to the Kyoto Protocol. In 2006 the Commission held a high-level panel discussion on “Gender equality and international migration”, which was transmitted to the General Assembly High-level debate on international migration. The Commission has for a number of years strengthened its collaboration with the Statistics Commission, including through organizing joint panels on gender statistics and indicators.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol is an important accountability mechanism supporting gender equality and empowerment of women at national level. It is a critical instrument which is unfortunately often under-utilized by Governments, the United Nations and NGOs. Ratification of the Convention imposes legal obligations on States to implement its provisions and report regularly (every four years) to the Committee responsible for monitoring implementation. Following the constructive dialogue with States parties, the Committee prepares Concluding Comments or recommendations on what further needs to be done to ensure full implementation of the Convention. These recommendations are tailored for each specific State party and States parties are expected to report back to the Committee on these specific issues when submitting their next reports. The Concluding Comments therefore constitute a critical instrument for work on gender equality which could be more systematically and effectively used in all efforts at national level.

At the ten-year review of implementation of the Platform for Action in 2005, Member States recognized the important synergies between the Platform and the Convention. The positive interaction between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in their efforts to ensure full implementation of both the policy and legal instruments on gender equality is a unique good practice in the United Nations, which is largely unrecognized. There are important learnings which could be usefully replicated in other contexts.

The importance of the gender mainstreaming strategy for rectifying the persistence of gender inequality and injustice cannot be over-emphasized. Efforts must be made to revitalize the implementation of the strategy. As a strategy, gender mainstreaming can only be as good as the implementation. In the past, it has not always been used in good faith. Some governments and organizations have done away with targeted initiatives for women and/or gender specialists with the argument that gender mainstreaming removes the need for special efforts. The Beijing Platform for Action requires both targeted interventions and mainstreaming efforts as complementary strategies. It is sometimes claimed that gender mainstreaming does not work because

giving responsibility to everyone results in no-one taking any responsibility. In most cases, however, no real responsibility transfer takes place at all and there are no serious attempts to implement gender mainstreaming.

Revitalizing the mainstreaming strategy requires constructively critical assessments of the efforts made, and development of new strategies for systematic and effective implementation, which should include strengthened political will, leadership by top and middle-level management, accountability mechanisms and dedicated resources.

An important but simple framework for the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women has been developed which can be utilized in all policy areas. It requires addressing the following elements, within a human rights framework: development of *capabilities* through, for example health and education; increased access to *resources* such as employment, credit and land and property rights; strengthened *agency*, through for example increased access to decision-making in all areas; and enhanced *safety and security*, for example through eradication of violence against women.

The on-going reform process in the United Nations provides an opportunity to strengthen the work on gender equality and empowerment of women. Since the ten-year review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, it has been clear that there is a need for reform in this area. The review of United Nations' mandates in 2005-2006 highlighted the need to ensure increased coherence and coordination and to reduce the risk of duplication and overlap, particularly in the context of limited resources. Requesting the high-level panel on coherence to consider gender equality as part of its mandate, was part of a move by the Secretary-General to push for greater coherence in this area.

The high-level panel recommended the creation of one gender equality body through the merging of the existing gender-specific entities – the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women and UNIFEM.¹ This proposal was part of a larger coherence reform package, which includes the proposal for United Nations delivering as one at national level. The proposal on gender equality has not moved forward over the past year as some Member States are not willing at this stage to consider one part of the reform package in isolation but prefer to negotiate the package as a whole.

As the reform of the gender equality work of the United Nations moves forward, there are a number of issues which need further attention. One is the relationship between the proposed gender equality body and the rest of the United Nations system, particularly in the context of the gender mainstreaming strategy which requires all parts of the system to take appropriate responsibility for achieving gender equality and empowerment of women. Another issue requiring careful thought is the role of the gender equality body on the ground, at regional and national levels, to ensure that they are supportive of the

¹ It has subsequently been proposed that the fourth gender-specific body, INSTRAW, also be merged into the one gender equality body.

primary role of the Resident Coordinator and Country Teams and are not expected to take over all responsibility for gender equality and gender justice.

The reform process provides a unique opportunity to revisit the vision of the United Nations in its work for gender equality. What is required is not simply a restructuring of the institutional arrangements in the United Nations. True reform of the work of the United Nations on gender equality and gender justice requires the development of an explicit vision and setting clearer goals and targets for the work. The reform process provides an opportunity to ensure a clearer delineation of responsibilities and accountability for gender equality. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the process does not involve a step backwards in this regard, with the gender equality body given prime responsibility for gender equality in the United Nations and the accountability of other parts of the system weakened.

The gender equality body should have a catalytic, advisory, supportive and monitoring role – supporting the fulfillment of the responsibilities of the senior management levels in the United Nations, in particular the Resident Coordinators and Country Teams at national level. Finally, the reform process must provide potential for increasing the dedicated resources for gender equality. At the very least, the discussions to date have brought to light the current under-resourcing of the gender equality work. OSAGI has only five professional staff in total, DAW only 16 professional staff in total, and UNIFEM 40 professional staff at headquarters level in New York.

The role of NGOs

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been active in the United Nations work on gender equality since the establishment of the Commission in 1946. NGOs have played a critical role in highlighting issues for attention on the global agenda, providing critical information and data, supporting implementation on the ground, monitoring government action on global commitments and supporting governments through partnering on critical issues.

The largest number of NGOs participate in the Commission than in any other functional commission in the United Nations. In 2007, for example, 1,900 NGO representatives attended the session of the Commission focused on the situation of the girl child. At the ten-year review in 2005, there were over 2000 NGO representatives. NGOs are very active during the session, submitting written statements, making oral statements, organizing parallel events and lobbying/advocating for particular issues. Prior to the sessions of the Commission, NGOs participate in the in-line discussion and Expert Group Meeting organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women on the priority theme. The NGO Committee on the Status of Women and the Division also organize two joint panels in the weeks prior to the session to stimulate discussion on the themes to be considered by the Commission.

NGOs prepare very well for the Commission through a consultation day for NGOs from around the world held just prior to the session. Daily briefings are also

organized during the session which provide both practical and substantive information. Caucuses are held on different themes.

A number of individual NGOs are also undertaking some impressive work in preparing for and following up participation in the Commission. For example, in recent years around 100 Anglican women from around the world have gone through a preparatory programme; been briefed and mentored during the session; and encouraged and supported to incorporate the findings from the Commission in their day-to-day work following the session. Other organizations are beginning to use a similar methodology. This means that NGO representatives are better prepared for participation; are clear about the changes they want to advocate for; and better able to follow-up to ensure change on the ground as a result of the work of the Commission.

NGOs can support the Commission in addressing the implementation gap by strengthening their work in the context of the annual sessions of the Commission, in particular by working to ensure the recommendations have an impact at national level. Innovations in follow-up to the Commission should be developed and disseminated. The revised working methods of the Commission, with a focus on review of implementation of recommendations two to three years after their adoption, provides a new opportunity for NGOs to actively support effective impact of the work of the Commission at national level.

NGOs can also use the Concluding Comments of the CEDAW Committee, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention, more systematically and effectively at national level to promote change.

NGOs should continue to lead on critical issues of gender equality and gender justice. NGOs, for example, played a lead role in placing violence against women on the global agenda. As a result, the Secretary-General was requested to prepare an in-depth study on violence against women, on the basis of which a strong resolution was adopted by the General Assembly in 2006. As a further follow-up, the Secretary-General will initiate a multi-year campaign on violence against women which will increase the leadership of the United Nations in this area, increase advocacy and support development of partnerships at national level to eradicate such violence by 2015. There are a number of critical areas where NGOs can show similar leadership, for example on gender perspectives on ICT, climate change and in relation to women in decision-making.

By working to ensure systematic attention to gender perspectives in their work, and recruiting women in decision-making positions at all levels, NGOs can provide a good example to Member States and the United Nations on both gender mainstreaming and gender balance, and thus ensure greater authority to the voice of NGOs in the United Nations context.

The 2008 session of the Commission on the Status of Women

The Commission on the Status of Women will consider “Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women” as its priority theme in order to follow-up on the recommendations on financing contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as to influence the preparations for the follow-up to the Monterrey Consensus in Qatar in 2008. The Commission will take up the following critical issues related to resource allocations for gender equality: macro-economic policies; public finance management (including gender-responsive budgets - where NGOs have played a key role in countries around the world); development cooperation; and other innovative sources of funding, including women’s funds. The Commission will also consider resources for critical stakeholders such as national mechanisms for the advancement of women. A important topic of discussion will be the resource situation of women’s groups and networks at global, regional and national levels, since recent research points to a crisis of funding for the women’s movement compared with ten years ago. Women’s groups and networks are struggling to survive and are not able to meet felt needs. The fastest growing source of funding is women’s funds set up by women for women, which specialize in much-needed smaller sized grants.

It is expected that stakeholders will also raise the resource allocation situation in relation to critical issues, such as violence against women and the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. In addition, the resource situation of gender equality work in the United Nations itself will be discussed – including the resource needs of the gender-specific entities (identified in the on-going reform discussions); the lack of resources for serious implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy; and the need for development of mechanisms for more effective tracking of resource allocations for gender equality and gender justice.

NGOs can play a critical role in ensuring that critical issues are discussed at the Commission by preparing official written statements; making strategic oral statements; preparing and disseminating “position papers” on resource needs in critical areas with clear recommendations for action – for example on the funding needs of the women’s movement; organizing parallel events on important issues; and actively lobbying government delegates during the session. A critical role will also be ensuring adequate follow-up at national level, including by monitoring that governments act on commitments made during the session.

In conclusion

Given that the gap between the policy commitments on gender equality and gender justice over the past six decades and actual implementation on the ground is increasingly recognized, it is extraordinary that there is not more outrage and calls for immediate action - particularly when the devastating consequences of the persistent gender inequalities and injustices, on individual women and on society as a whole, are taken into account. It is a development imperative to acknowledge and act on the fact that it is will not be possible to achieve the goals of the development agenda as long as gender inequality and injustice persist.

Systematic and effective achievement of gender equality and gender justice requires moving away from viewing gender inequality and injustice as a sort of “second-grade” inequality and injustice, forced to take a “back-seat” to other “more important” forms of inequality and injustice. In many processes, such as liberation struggles and the fight against racial inequality and injustice, women were often informed that it was necessary to wait for gender equality until the larger freedoms were won. It is time for a better understanding that gender inequality and injustice are inextricably linked to other forms of inequality and injustice. It is not possible to fight some inequalities and injustices without attention to all others. We cannot wait for gender equality and gender justice. Gender inequality and injustice are both part of the causes and consequences of all other inequalities and injustices. Effective work with gender equality and gender justice requires full understanding of the interlinkages with other inequalities and injustices. Similarly, effective efforts to reduce other inequalities and injustices, such as poverty, require explicit attention to gender inequalities and injustice. It is critical to recognize these interlinkages and address them in a coherent manner.

All NGOs –not just women’s NGOs - should play a stronger leadership role in addressing the implementation gap on gender equality and gender justice, through enhanced advocacy, awareness raising, development of innovative methods and piloting of new approaches, and strengthened monitoring of government efforts to implement commitments. NGOS could keep attention focused on the clear message of the Heads of State when they met in 2000 and again in 2005, and hold governments accountable for upholding it in practice: Gender equality and empowerment of women is essential for development in any area, and equality and justice for women is necessary for equality and justice for all.

Thank you.