

**Presentation at the Communication Workshop
organized by the NGO Section/DPI**

**ADDRESSING GENDER ISSUES WITH THE UN:
PRESENT AND FUTURE
Dag Hammarskjold Library Auditorium, 15 February 2007**

**Carolyn Hannan, Director
Division for the Advancement of Women
Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

Mr. Moderator,
Friends and Colleagues,

It is a pleasure for me to address this workshop. I would like to congratulate and thank Mr. Juan Carlos Brandt, Chief of NGO Section, Department of Public Information, and his colleagues for taking this initiative.

Apologies from Ms Mayanja. Attending the funeral in Jamaica for Ms. Angela King, the former Special Adviser to the Secretary-General in Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, who passed away last Monday.

In beginning my presentation I would like to pay a brief tribute to Angela who was a colleague, friend and mentor, I had the privilege of working very closely with Angela on gender equality in the UN. Her vision, courage, forthright advocacy for and dedication to the cause of gender equality and empowerment of women was a true inspiration for us all. Angela led ground-breaking work in the UN on, among other things, women, peace and security, women's human rights and gender balance in the UN itself. She provided space for women and their organizations and networks to interact with international decision-makers and to contribute to strengthening UN capacity to work on gender equality issues. The best service we can render Angela's memory is to ensure a strong and effective United Nations, working collaboratively with all stakeholders, towards a vision of a world where equality between women and men is a reality.

The successes that the United Nations has achieved since its inception, particularly through the UN Decade for Women and its follow-up, including the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, owe much to close partnerships with non-governmental organizations at global, regional and national levels. The women's movement has played a particularly critical role in moving the gender equality agenda of the United Nations forward. Women's organizations and networks have worked directly with women at grassroots level, providing services and creating opportunities for women

to have a stronger "voice" in affairs that concern them. They have acted as watchdogs at national level, holding Governments accountable to their global commitments and obligations, and systematically monitoring and reporting on progress - highlighting gaps, challenges and constraints, and equally important, celebrating achievements at all levels.

Women's groups and networks, have increased in strength and effectiveness and have played a very strategic role in moving the global agenda on gender equality forward. Non-governmental organizations have energized the debates on critical areas and contributed to increasing the visibility and recognition of the importance of gender equality for development. A great deal of the sustained attention and the achievements made over the past decades has been due to their efforts. At global level

The experience of the UN through the four world conferences and their follow-up has shown clearly that partnerships with NGOs continue to be essential for moving forward. The challenges to gender equality and empowerment of women today are complex and cannot be adequately tackled by Governments and the United Nations alone. They require a multi-dimensional approach involving all stakeholders, particularly NGOs. It is, however, time to develop more creative strategies for working together to meet the challenges of this new Millennium and ensure full implementation of the commitments to gender equality and empowerment of women.

It is important to acknowledge that there have been many significant achievements of the United Nations at global level - we have in place today excellent policy and normative instruments for gender equality - the policy framework of the Beijing Platform for Action adopted in consensus in 1995, and the legal framework in the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1989, and today ratified by 185 Member States.

In more recent years, other significant policy advances have been achieved. The adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was a watershed in identifying the critical issues for women in relation to peace and security and developing strategies for addressing these. Gender equality and empowerment of women was established as one of 8 Millennium Development Goals, and the gender equality implications of all goals are increasingly recognized. The 2005 World Summit recognized that "progress for women is progress for all" and that the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is essential to achieving all other internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

It is, however, also important to note that there has been a serious challenge in the attempts in recent years at all levels - global, regional and national - to roll back commitments already made, particularly in the area of sexual and reproductive health and

women's human rights. This has made further development of policy at global level at times over the past decade extremely difficult.

Equally problematic is that fact that the 10-year review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at national level in 2005 clearly indicated that - while gains have been made in many areas, in terms, for example, of policies, legislation and institutional mechanisms on gender equality - there is a huge gap between the policy recommendations and the obligations of States and their translation into concrete action and positive outcomes on the ground. The Declaration adopted by Member States at the ten-year review called for accelerated implementation of the Platform for Action. Ways and means must be developed to ensure strengthened inter-linkages between normative and operational work of the United Nations to ensure that the policies, norms and standards adopted at global level have positive impacts on the lives of women and girls at national level.

I would like to suggest that there are significant opportunities for active involvement of NGOs in addressing these challenges. The Commission on the Status of Women, which will meet in New York in a little over a week, from 26 February to 9 March, has adopted new working methods to try to address the challenge of national-level implementation. The Commission draws that greatest number of NGO representatives of any intergovernmental process in the UN. For the forthcoming session there are well over 4,000 NGOs pre-registered.

In an attempt to contribute to addressing the gap between policy and practice, the Division for the Advancement of Women is encouraging UN entities and NGOs to more actively use the sessions of the Commission - both the preparation process and the dissemination and use of the outcomes - as a means to raise awareness, develop knowledge, strengthen commitment and stimulate concrete action on the ground.

For example, the Commission will focus on the elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child as its priority theme at the coming session. UNICEF has been an active partner with the Division, as has the NGO Committee on UNICEF's Working Group on Girls. Efforts have been made to ensure that there is awareness in all regions that the Commission is focusing on the girl child in 2007, and in this particular case, also to ensure that girls themselves are aware and engaged. Following the Commission, we will encourage UNICEF, other UN entities and all NGOs to ensure that the new policy recommendations are widely disseminated at country level and actively used in different contexts to stimulate change.

This is an area where I think there is scope for more creative thinking and development of new strategies, particularly since, as a part of its new working methods, the Commission will also review systematically implementation of its new policy recommendations at a future session, in two or three years time. This means we will have an opportunity to assess the impact of our strategies to use the Commission more effectively.

The Commission will address the priority theme of financing for gender equality and empowerment of women at its 2008 session - another critical issue with particular implications for NGOs, given the crisis of funding for the women's movement. In 2009, the Commission will address the issue of financing for gender equality and empowerment of women in 2008 and sharing of family responsibilities between women and men in 2009.

Ms decide on themes but can influence...

I also believe there are many under-utilized opportunities for more effectively utilizing the work of the CEDAW Committee, where NGOs could play a particularly critical role. Facilitating the greater impact of CEDAW at national level can be done in many ways - advocating for ratification or withdrawal or reservations where this is relevant; supporting the development of the national report on implementation of the Convention for presentation to the Committee; and supporting the implementation through dissemination and utilization of the concluding comments prepared by the Committee after its constructive dialogue with the States party. NGOs can and do also prepare shadow reports to complement the official report submitted by the Government, and the Committee meets with representatives of NGOs from countries which are presenting their reports to the Committee.

The value of the concluding comments as a set of recommendations specifically tailored to the countries reporting is often overlooked.

I would also like to draw your attention to the Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women which was presented to the 61st General Assembly, as well as to the adoption of resolution A/RES/61/143 on "the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women". This presents another critical opportunity for collaboration between the UN and NGOs in ensuring sustained and effective action at national level to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. Advocacy and support from all stakeholders will be critical. NGOs from around the world were deeply involved in the intensive consultations prior to the finalization of the study and it will be important to ensure active mobilization of civil society in the implementation and follow-up work at all levels. Within the UN, an Inter-agency Taskforce on Violence against Women has been established, co-chaired by UNFPA and DAW. The taskforce will work to ensure a coherent, effective approach within the UN system and will develop models for a coordinated strategy in pilot countries. Consultation and exchange with NGOs in this work will be critical.

Finally, let me say a few words on the reform of gender equality work in the United Nations. As you are aware, the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment stressed in its report (A/61/583), that "the United Nations needs a much stronger voice on women's issues..." and highlighted the importance of ensuring that "the United Nations works more effectively with Governments and civil society in this mission." To meet this challenge, the High-level Panel recommended streamlining and consolidating three of the

United Nations existing gender equality institutions - the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) - into one body.

Following the presentation of the report, and an intensive in-house consultative process, the former Secretary-General presented a revised proposal, adapted to the needs of the Organization, to consolidate these gender equality bodies into a new office combining normative and operational mandates, to be headed by an Under-Secretary-General reporting directly to the Secretary-General. The report of the High-level panel and the proposal of the Secretary-General are currently with the General Assembly for discussion at its resumed 61st session.

The discussion of institutional mechanisms for gender equality within the UN provides an important opportunity to review past strategies and mechanisms and develop structures and processes which can more adequately meet current challenges in order to further the implementation of the gender equality mandates. NGOs can play an important role in this process. There are three key issues which I would like to briefly raise as critical to ensuring that the process leads to a positive outcome. Firstly, the need to ensure that the starting point is strengthening efforts at country-level and explicitly addressing the gap between policy and practice; secondly, the importance of enhancing gender mainstreaming and avoiding marginalization of gender equality issues, i.e. ensuring systematic and effective attention to gender equality issues and the needs and priorities of women in all areas of work; and thirdly, the need for additional resources - both human and financial - to ensure that the UN can provide adequate support to Member States and other partners in this work, including to NGOs.

The United Nations remains critical for moving forward on gender equality and empowerment of women. It is important that all actors and stakeholders are fully engaged in ensuring that the UN can continue to play a key role in this millennium so that the gains made are not only maintained but also expanded significantly to meet new challenges. I hope that I have provided some useful suggestions. I look forward to continued and expanded collaboration with NGOs from all around the world, which provides much needed inspiration and challenges to those of us working within the UN to ensure the UN provides the leadership required for positive outcomes on the ground.