

CAMPAIGN FOR STRONGER GENDER EQUALITY ARCHITECTURE REFORM (GEAR) AT THE UN

CONTEXT

For the past three decades, women's organizations and movements have seen the United Nations as a galvanizing force for our efforts to define a comprehensive global agenda for peace and security, human rights, gender equality, women's empowerment, poverty eradication and sustainable development. Many important advances have been made for women, yet governments have failed overall to implement the commitments to women's rights they have made in the CEDAW Convention, Beijing Platform for Action and in agreements from many UN world conferences, including those on human rights, population and development, sustainable development, HIV/AIDS, the Millennium Summit, including the Millennium Development Goals, and the 2005 World Summit.

The UN lacks an effective mechanism to deliver on these promises; it needs an independent, women-specific agency with adequate stature, resources, operational capacity in the field, and a mandate and high level leadership to drive this agenda. Such a lead women's agency is necessary, along with well-resourced, effective mainstreaming efforts throughout the system. Currently, the UN has several small under-resourced agencies focused exclusively on women's issues; other larger agencies sometimes do important work on gender equality, but it is a small part of their mandate, and often receives low priority.

The 2005 World Summit Outcome Document called for a stronger system-wide coherence by strengthening linkages between the normative work of the UN system and its operational activities. The Secretary-General requested a High Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence to review the UN system in the areas of humanitarian affairs, environment and development, and after women's rights advocates from around the world pressured the UN to better address gender equality in the reform process, the Panel made recommendations to strengthen the gender architecture.

The UN Reform process has already yielded concrete results including the creation of a Human Rights Council and a new Peace Building Commission. Now there is an extraordinary opportunity as part of the reform process to strengthen the gender equality architecture to deliver better results for women.

The High Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence recommended:

- Creating a stronger UN organization for women through consolidating some of the women's mechanisms that already exist (including the Division for the Advancement of Women [DAW], the Office of the Secretary General's Special Adviser on Gender Issues [OSAGI] and the United Nations Development Fund for Women [UNIFEM]). The new organization would have a dual mandate of both normative and programmatic responsibilities and would operate at both global policy and country levels.

- Creating a new Under-Secretary General position to head this agency. This position would have higher status than the leadership of the current UN women's entities. It would enable high-level representation for women's rights in UN decision-making, both in policy-development and program operations at the global and field levels.
- "Ambitiously" funding the new organization.

We NOW have an opportunity to use these recommendations to press governments to support change that enables the UN to deliver more for women's rights and empowerment at the local level and worldwide!

Join GEAR, the global campaign to strengthen the Gender Equality Architecture at the UN!

CAMPAIGN DEMANDS:

A stronger women's organization that can deliver results on the ground:

- Support the High Level Panel's recommendations to strengthen the gender equality architecture of the UN.
- Ensure that the new women's organization has a country presence and a strong "operational" mandate that builds on what is already in place.
- Ensure that the new women's organization has the capacity to deliver with substantial and predictable resources, initially funded at a minimum level of \$500 million to \$1 billion USD with increases over time.
- Promote accountability within the new organization including meaningful involvement of non-governmental organizations, particularly women's organizations, in its ongoing processes at national and global levels.
- Promote gender mainstreaming by the integration of gender equality and women's human rights in the One UN Country Pilots and in all UN reform processes.

Urge all Governments to:

- Move the GEA process forward as soon as possible. Don't let it be held back by controversies over other aspects of UN reform.
- Support timely and effective implementation of these GEA proposals.
- Provide substantial resources through voluntary contributions for the new women's organization.

Your phone calls, faxes and emails can make a real difference in what positions governments take in these negotiations. They need to hear our demands NOW and to understand why these concerns should be addressed at this time.

Join in the call for a stronger women's rights organization at the UN that has greater status, expanded field presence, and a higher level of funding. Join the GEAR Campaign.

To read a more comprehensive discussion of women's concerns about gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the UN and UN Reform, please see the submission to the Coherence Panel of July, 2006, signed by over 118 groups around the world, titled: "Gender Equality Architecture and UN Reforms", available at the CWGL and WEDO websites:

<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/unadvocacy/gea.html>; and at www.wedo.org.

Please note that only organizations and networks can join, not individuals! If your group joins, that means that you support the materials and calls for action that will be generated by the campaign, but groups can opt out of signing specific statements if they wish.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION OF PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

The High Level Panel on UN System-Wide Coherence recommended the consolidation of UNIFEM, DAW and OSAGI. Some governments have recommended that INSTRAW (the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women) also be included in this consolidation. We support the inclusion of INSTRAW in the new organization.

The leader of the new entity, according to the Panel, should be an Under-Secretary General selected through an open and transparent process. It is also imperative that the person hired have proven expertise in gender equality issues.

The Panel discussed their view of “ambitious funding,” and an initial recommendation of \$200 million was suggested as a minimum. The figure was omitted in the Panel’s final report to ensure that it would not be seen as the maximum sum needed, and to keep open the possibility of even greater funding. \$200 million – when measured in terms of actual staffing and budgets at the country level – is too low to achieve the goals of GEA reform.

It is imperative that all of these elements, including the dual mandate of normative and operational responsibilities, be part of the new structure. The main thrust of the Panel’s recommendations, based on input from women’s rights advocates around the world, was to enhance the structural capacity of the UN system to deliver better results for women’s equality at the country level. Any proposed change in the GEA that either fails to expand or constrains the field presence would be an unacceptable step backward.

The Panel also recommended a restructuring of the UN system at the country level into “One UN”, which, among other things, streamlines UN offices/funds/programs and the delivery of development at the country level. There are now 8 countries “piloting” this approach (Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay, and Vietnam.). As these pilots move forward they must integrate and address gender equality and women’s experiences. However, there are many different perspectives on the “One UN” approach, and the GEAR campaign is not taking a position either for or against it. Whatever structures are adopted, gender equality and women’s rights need to be more effectively addressed in every part of the UN system, and the campaign will advocate for this in general. Many campaign members are engaged in various UN reform efforts, including the Human Rights Council, Peacebuilding Commission, environmental governance and others to ensure that women’s rights and gender equality are better integrated into these bodies and processes.

The UN reform process and the Panel’s recommendations are critical elements for the advancement of women’s human rights, gender equality and women’s empowerment in the international system. If pursued effectively, they would provide national, regional and international mechanisms, along with high level leadership and the necessary resources, that would enable governments and the UN system to make a greater difference in improving the lives of women.

