

## Speed Briefing: Debate on UN Women – 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011

### Key messages

- VSO welcomes the Coalition Government's pledge to "lead international action to improve the lives of women and girls" as one of six priorities in DFID's 2011-2015 plan. The UK Government was central to the establishment of UN Women, the new UN agency for gender equality and the empowerment of women, and we would like to see the UK continue its leadership by investing in the new agency.
- The Government should commit £21m in annual core funding – just 0.2% of the UK's overseas aid budget – to UN Women. This would be equal to the Government's past funding of UNICEF; an agency with similar scope and reach.
- UN Women's success is currently threatened by a massive funding shortfall, with new pledges to the agency currently only reaching \$55 million out of the \$500 million target set by member states.
- Investing in women ensures excellent impact and value for money. Research by Chatham House, described below, has revealed that tackling gender inequality can improve economic growth and reduce corruption.

### What is UN Women?

UN Women was established in July 2010 by the UN General Assembly and became operational on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2011. It is led by Michelle Bachelet, the former President of Chile. The new agency was formed by the merger of four small and under-resourced entities, including the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and has responsibility for the UN's work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The creation of the agency came as a direct result of pressure from over 300 women's and civil society organisations, including VSO, who saw that the UN system was failing women. The new agency has established five priority areas for its work:

- Expanding women's voice, leadership and participation;
- Ending violence against women;
- Strengthening women's full participation in conflict resolution and peace processes;
- Enhancing women's economic empowerment; and
- Ensuring gender priorities are reflected in national plans and budgets.

### Why do we want the UK Government to provide £21 million?

Currently, new pledges to UN Women for 2011 amount to less than \$55 million; just over 10% of the target set by member states in 2010. The UK Government has provided a small amount in transitional funds, but is yet to make a funding pledge for the future. We are calling on the UK Government to urgently provide £21 million in core funding to the new agency because:

- £21 million is equal to the core funding the UK provides to UNICEF. We believe that the UK should devote equal resources to tackling the barriers that affect women as they do to tackling the issues that affect children.
- The UK was instrumental in establishing the agency and ensuring it has an ambitious and unique mandate, including supporting "all members states, across all levels of development and in all regions" by

strengthening the link between policy and practice, and coordinating the UN's work on gender. It now has a responsibility to make sure it is able to fulfil this mandate. The Government's own aid review, published on March 1<sup>st</sup>, recognised that "the trajectory and potential of reform is very strong under UN Women."

- The Coalition Government has committed to "lead international action to improve the lives of women and girls" as one of DFID's six priorities for 2011-2014. The UK should therefore aspire to be the leading donor. Committing £21 million (\$34 million) would place the UK at the head of the list of international donors to UN Women, outstripping Spain (\$21 million) and Canada (\$10million) and the United States (only \$8 million is currently earmarked for UN Women in the US budget, pending Congressional approval).

### Why is it important that the UK urgently provides substantial funding?

- DFID's review of multilateral aid, published on 1<sup>st</sup> March, recognised that UNIFEM had failed due to "constrained resources". Without significant commitment from member states, there is a risk that UN Women will suffer the same fate.
- UN Women has inherited the under-resourced infrastructure of UNIFEM and currently only has minimal staff and presence around the world. While UNICEF has over 10,000 staff and a presence in 190 countries, UNIFEM had only 230 staff (the majority on short term contracts) and a presence on the ground in only 80 countries. Funding is urgently needed to expand this capacity.
- Already, momentum is being lost as other donors including member states defer pledges until the UK makes an announcement. These first months are a critical time for the new agency and a loss of fundraising momentum could mean that UN Women continues to fail women around the world.

### How will UN Women provide value for money and deliver results?

- Women are disproportionately affected by poverty and, as a consequence, are often unable to contribute to their country's development. Recent DFID funded research by Chatham House (2010) showed the gains that can be made by investing in women: household income could increase by 25% in Africa through more efficient allocation of resources between men and women in agricultural production and an increase of 25% in the proportion of female parliamentarians leads to a one point improvement in the International Country Risk Guide corruption rating (an index that ranges between 0 and 6).
- DFID's Multilateral Aid Review highlighted the poor performance of the majority of UN agencies in ensuring that their programmes address gender inequality. UN Women will work closely with other agencies to ensure the billions of dollars they spend are delivering equally for women as well as men. (For example, UNDP's budget for 2010 was over \$5bn, and UNICEF's over \$3bn)
- Recent research by VSO UK and Oxfam (2011), canvassing the views of 100 women's organisations, found that there is strong alignment between what grassroots organisations think UN Women must urgently tackle and the issues UN Women has identified as its thematic areas, outlined above. 72% of respondents selected violence against women as a top priority for the new agency, 42% selected women's access to decision making as a priority and 41% said economic empowerment.

### What is the Godmothers Campaign?

The Godmothers is a campaign led by VSO which has brought together thousands of men and women to watch over UN Women and ensure it lives up to its promise. In the last 5 weeks, over 1000 people have written to their MP asking them to support EDM 1318. The EDM now has close to 100 signatures. On 16<sup>th</sup> February, over 100 people participated in a 'Day of Action' at Westminster and lobbied MPs from around the country to encourage them to support UN Women.

### More Information

For more detailed information about UN Women, see our policy briefing "UN Women: The Opportunity of a Generation". Alternatively, please contact Martin McCluskey, VSO Parliamentary Relations Manager on martin.mccluskey@vso.org.uk or 0775 218 2979.