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Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP
Shadow Secretary-of-State for International Development
House of Commons
London
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Tuesday, 08 September 2009

Dear Mr Mitchell,

UK Gender and Development Network (UK GADN) Response to the Conservative Party Green Paper on International Development

The UK GAD Network is a diverse membership network of leading practitioners, academics and consultants working on gender and development issues in the UK, which has been actively advocating for greater attention to gender equality within international development since its founding in 1985. As 70% of the world's poorest, we feel strongly that the voices and needs of women and girls living in poverty should be central to the UK's approach to development.

Whilst the UK GADN welcomes the publication of 'One World Conservatism' and the party's commitments to increase aid by 0.7% and maintain a separate Department for International Development (DFID), we are gravely concerned by the scarce reference to women throughout this document. In particular, there is a lack of gender analysis on any of the substantive issues discussed in the paper, including security, economic growth, climate change and governance. It is widely acknowledged within the international development community that empowering women is crucial to development effectiveness, as well as a moral imperative, and we feel strongly that a focus on empowering women would enhance the Green Paper's central aims.

We welcome the Green Paper's focus on poverty alleviation and social development, and we are pleased that the Conservative Party have committed to a continued focus and funding of health and education services. Women are the poorest of the poor and any reduction in social services during a recession is likely to hit women and their families hardest. We also welcome the Poverty Impact Fund for smaller NGOs, and the commitment to strengthen the downward accountability to the beneficiaries of aid, and would be pleased to discuss how these initiatives can be developed to support gender equality goals.

We also welcome the Paper's commitment to continue working towards achieving the MDGs and particularly to MDG5 on maternal mortality. Whilst we agree that commitment to these goals is essential, it is now widely recognised that ending poverty and achieving sustainable economic growth are dependent on tackling the root causes of structural inequalities, such as gender inequality. To truly empower women, development strategies need to go beyond the limited remit of sexual and reproductive health and maternal mortality and place women's political, social and economic empowerment at their heart.

Finally we are concerned by the lack of reference to social exclusion in the Green Paper, particularly violence against women, disability, and HIV/AIDs. All of these create barriers to women realising their rights across the spectrum of development issues and are central to women's ability to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

The UK GADN welcomes the Conservative Party's call for civil society engagement in further developing the policies contained in the Green Paper, and would like to invite you to meet with the Board of the GADN to identify how we could engage constructively on some of the specific recommendations raised in the Green Paper. We also hope you will be able to attend a reception organised by network members on Wednesday 7th October, 17:30, at the Conservative Party Conference, which will showcase successful initiatives to promote women's empowerment.

We will follow up with your office for a response in the next week, and we look forward to working with you in the near future.

Yours Sincerely,

The Steering Group of the UK Gender and Development Network