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Honorable Kofi Annan  
Secretary-General  
United Nations

Dear Mr. Annan,

We understand that you are finalizing your report in preparation for the Millennium Summit in September, which will respond to the recommendations of the High Level Panel on Threats and Challenges and to the report of the Millennium Project, *Investing in Development*. We endorse the overall approaches of these reports linking security, human rights and development in a holistic way and appreciate your leadership in advancing these goals. We are writing now to underscore the importance of utilizing this occasion to ensure that UN leadership and heads of state reaffirm their commitments to the human rights of women and to full political, economic and social equality for women.

In the Millennium Declaration adopted in 2000, world leaders resolved: "to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger, disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable." They also resolved to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In the road map that followed, Millennium Development Goal #3 specifically calls for gender equality and women's empowerment. Unfortunately only one target dealing with girls education was set. The Task Force on Goal #3 of the Millennium Project in its report, *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*, goes much further and we endorse its recommendations and particularly the identification of seven strategic priorities "as the minimum necessary to empower women and alter the historical legacy of female disadvantage." We have also joined other colleagues in calling for the inclusion in your report of specific language on the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

What we want to stress here is that the overarching vision of the Millennium Summit, to reduce poverty among the world's poorest, who are primarily women and children, will not and cannot be achieved unless gender equality and women's empowerment are defined broadly to include the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW, and are fully integrated into all of the goals. To date, as is documented in women's NGO reports for the ten-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action, the actions of governments have not matched their promises. There has been both a lack of political will and of commitment of resources for implementation. In light of the growing conservative backlash against women's human rights and a reduction in the space for many women to pursue different roles and lifestyles, a reaffirmation of the centrality of gender equality to human security and development is needed now more than ever.

Therefore we urge you to include the following recommendations in your report:

- 1. Gender equality and women's empowerment are central to poverty eradication.** As noted in Investing in Development (p.30), governments must invest to overcome gender bias. We cannot afford macroeconomic policies and poverty reduction strategies that are gender blind. As the project report notes, governments need to invest in the protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights, equal access and control of economic assets such as land and housing, equal employment opportunities etc. One very concrete step toward these goals is the collection and reporting of gender disaggregated data. Another step is the recognition and valuation of women's unpaid work in the care economy which all economies depend on.
- 2. Gender balance in political decision making is essential to democratic governance.** Yet only 15 countries have achieved a critical mass of at least 30% in their parliaments ten years after governments committed to this target in Beijing. It has been demonstrated in every region of the world that affirmative measures--such as quotas--can result in rapid increase in the numbers of women represented at every level of government as we have seen from local panchayats in India, to the parliament of Rwanda, to the judges on the International Criminal Court. Heads of state should be asked to make this commitment.
- 3. Universal ratification of CEDAW and the repeal of laws that discriminate against women are critical to providing a comprehensive international human rights legal standard for gender equality.** The effective implementation of CEDAW has been enhanced by the Optional Protocol to it and more governments should be urged to adopt it as well as to remove all reservations to this vital treaty. The repeal of all laws that discriminate against women by the year 2005 is one of the few concrete targets to which governments made a commitment in the Beijing Platform and meeting that commitment should be a priority.
- 4. Combatting violence against women and girls is critical to the achievement of the millennium development goals and to achieving greater human security.** No issue better illustrates the insecurity that plagues half the population, and yet, both the Threats and Challenges Panel and the MDGs are virtually silent on it. Millennium Project Task Force 3 calls for making this a strategic priority for achieving gender equality, and the linkages between such violence and goal 6 - combating HIV/AIDS, are also increasingly clear. Inclusion of specific

language on violence against women and girls, its linkages to many of the MDGs as well as to security, and the need for more systematic data on it and for greater resources to combat it would be vital steps forward.

We thank you for your leadership on these important goals and look forward to continuing to work with the United Nations towards their achievement.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Bunch, Executive Director  
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