

31 March, 2005

TO: Mr. Kofi Annan
Secretary-General
of the United Nations

CC: Ms. Louise Fréchette
Deputy Secretary-General
of the United Nations

Dear Secretary-General Annan:

We appreciate your effort to promote a renewed vision and urgent action through more vigorous and effective international cooperation by the nations of the world as set forth in your report "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All." And yet we were profoundly disappointed that in this 21st century, especially following the recent ten year review of the Beijing Platform for Action, one of the most spirited and well-attended UN meetings, the promotion of women's equality and human rights is not recognized as central to the achievement of these fundamental goals that we all share.

This critical gap in the report was underscored during the March 21 briefing with NGOs by your Chief of Staff. Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), United Methodist Women and other groups, posed questions to Mark Malloch Brown about the failure to integrate gender equality in a cross-cutting and substantive way throughout the report, noting the success of the recently-concluded Beijing10 review and the important constituency that women represent for the United Nations. His response and we quote, "We could have done a better job." He then went on to note that there were all men on the podium but that Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette had been very involved with the report and that other female staff members had been involved as well. We do not consider this response adequate or consistent with your message on International Women's Day in which you aptly urged "... the international community to remember that promoting gender equality is not only women's responsibility - it is the responsibility of all of us".

For some 30 years women have mobilized to place gender equality and women's human rights on the global policy agenda at key United Nations international conferences and in many other UN venues. It is now widely recognized within the United Nations and the broader global development, peace and human rights communities that the achievement of the MDGs depend on the centrality and cross cutting implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment. This was reinforced in your February 28, 2005 remarks opening the Beijing+10 review: "There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women." We couldn't agree more and welcomed your comments.

It is, therefore, disappointing that these fundamental principles, based on extensive research and decades of development experience, are missing from the overall framework of your report. Despite repeated verbal support throughout the UN at the highest levels, it is painfully clear that gender perspectives continue to be marginalized or inconsistently addressed rather than integrated in the overall strategy and programs of the United Nations.

We have seen on too many occasions the promotion of women's equality when officials address audiences of women, yet when addressing broader audiences, these principles receive scant attention if any at all. 2005 is too critical a juncture, as you note, for half of the world's population to be mere passive beneficiaries rather than full-fledged actors for security, development and human rights at every level from the local to global—not just because women's equality is fair and just but because it is essential to achieving these shared goals for all humanity. This neglect is jeopardizing the achievement not only of the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW, but also the MDGs and many of the other goals proposed in this report.

We urgently request a meeting with you as soon as possible to help identify ways to more effectively incorporate a gender perspective in preparations for and the outcome of the five-year review of the Millennium Summit. We remain eager to work with your office and look forward to continuing to work with the United Nations to better integrate women's equality and human rights and to increase the likelihood of achieving peace, development and human rights for all. June Zeitlin, Executive Director, Women's Environment and Development Organization will be the contact person to arrange for such a meeting. She can be reached at 212-973-0325 or june@wedo.org

Sincerely,

Action Aid International (Zimbabwe)
Everjoice J. Win

African Women's Development and Communications Network (Kenya)
(FEMNET)
L. Muthoni Wanyeki

Asia Pacific Women's Watch (APWW) (Philippines)
Patricia B. Licuanan

Association for Progressive Communications (Nepal)
(Women's Networking Support Programme)
Chat Garcia Ramilo

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) (Canada)
Joanna Kerr

Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) (Canada)
Lise Martin

Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) (U.S.A.)
Charlotte Bunch

Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristan (Peru)
Blanca Fernández

Hague Appeal for Peace (U.S.A.)
Cora Weiss

India Women's Watch (IWW) (India)
Pam Rajput

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) (Belgium)
Elsa Ramos

International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN) (U.S.A.)
Alexandra Spielfeld

Just Associates (U.S.A.)
Lisa Veneklasen

KARAT Coalition (Poland)
Kinga Lohmann

MADRE (U.S.A.)
Vivian Stromberg

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (Ireland)
Kate McCullough

Nova Scotia Women's FishNet (Canada)
Linda Christiansen-Ruffman

Oxfam International (UK)
Bernice Romero

Saathi Nepal/Sancharika Samuha (Women's Media Forum) (Nepal)
Bandana Rana

South Asia Women's Watch (SAWW) (India)
Pam Rajput

United Methodist Office for the United Nations (USA)
Vina Nadjibula

Women As the Voice of the Environment (WAVE), Caribbean (Suriname)
Monique Essed-Fernandes

Women in Development in Europe (WIDE) (Belgium)
Wendy Harcourt

Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) (The Netherlands)
Irene Dankelman

Women's Action for New Directions (WAND) (U.S.A.)
Susan Shaer

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) (U.S.A.)
June Zeitlin

Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice (The Netherlands)
Brigid Inder

Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (U.S.A.)
Carol Barton

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (U.S.A.)
Kara Piccirilli

World Alliance for Citizen Participation (South Africa)
Kumi Naidoo

World Conservation Union (IUCN) (Costa Rica)
Lorena Aguilar