

WOMEN GEAR UP: GOVERNMENTS RESPOND

Statement from the Linkage Caucus at the UN Commission on the Status of Women
March 2008

The Linkage Caucus' clarion call to "GEAR UP" and strengthen the UN's gender equality architecture was carried by hundreds of women at the 2008 annual session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) as well by numerous member states, and the UN Secretary General. In their national statements, over 40 countries spoke to the need to strengthen the United Nations' institutional mechanisms on gender equality and called for a consolidated women's entity led by an Under Secretary General and with extensive country presence. The civil society GEAR (Gender Equality Architecture Reform) Campaign launched at the CSW to advance these goals now has over 250 organizations as members from all regions of the world.

Agreed Conclusions from the CSW, which were finalized in the early morning hours of Saturday March 8th, incorporated several of the key demands of the GEAR Campaign. The Conclusions noted "under-resourcing in the area of gender equality in the UN system" and stressed "the need for more effective tracking of resources... spent on enhancing gender equality..." (paragraph 19). In addition, the Agreed Conclusions called for strengthening the UN system both through more effective gender mainstreaming, and for "enhancing its capacity to effectively assist States upon request... on gender equality and women's empowerment...and to make adequate and reliable human and financial resources available" (paragraph kk). We note with appreciation that countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America took the lead in advocating for stronger institutional mechanisms. Clearly, support for a stronger women's entity is widespread. Women around the world will continue to advocate for this with their government representatives at home and at the UN General Assembly.

The Linkage Caucus is pleased that the Agreed Conclusions propose that governments "incorporate gender perspectives into all economic policy-making and increase participation of women in economic governance structures and processes" (paragraph f), carry out gender-sensitive analysis of "revenues and expenditures in all policy arenas" (paragraph o) and of "policy and programmes related to macroeconomic stability, structural adjustment, external debt problems, taxation,...and all relevant sectors of the economy" (paragraph n), "undertake gender-sensitive assessments of national labor laws..."(paragraph x), and redirect excessive military expenditures to "social and economic development, including, inter alia, for gender equality and the advancement of women (paragraph hh). The Linkage Caucus supports the call for governments to "integrate gender perspectives in the preparations for and outcome of the 'Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus', to be held in Qatar in 2008" (paragraph 23).

However, women around the world present at the CSW remain deeply concerned that there are few meaningful commitments in the Agreed Conclusions related to financing for gender equality, with no concrete targets or timetables and no strong mechanisms for effective tracking or monitoring of financial resources spent on gender equality. Despite repeated calls by civil society and governments noting the importance of investing in women, it is widely recognized that the allocation of financial resources has been insufficient at all levels for real progress toward realizing the twelve critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. In addition, progress toward meeting Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 on gender equality and MDG 5 on maternal mortality have been lagging behind progress made with respect to the other MDGs due to insufficient financial and political investment in women. Moreover, the Agreed Conclusions fail to address the need for adequate resources and funding mechanisms to support the indispensable role of women's organizations as the driving force for gender equality and the empowerment of women at all levels.

We look forward to continuing advocacy in support of a strengthened gender equality architecture within the UN system. The GEAR campaign will advocate for this goal with national governments, at the General Assembly, and with the facilitators of the process to follow up on the recommendations of the High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence. Advocates can build on the CSW's broad support from governments and civil society for moving forward on creating stronger institutional mechanisms for women that can deliver real improvements in women's daily lives. The time to act to create a new women's entity is now!

One important step that can be taken toward this end immediately is the appointment by the Secretary General of a strong Executive Director of UNIFEM. The Linkage Caucus notes the urgency of this matter, and encourages the SG to make this appointment without further delay.

**The Linkage Caucus is coordinated each year during the CSW by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), and the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in New York.