

Women Meet with the UN Deputy-Secretary General to Discuss the Position of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women

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Last week representatives of women's organizations and the Chair of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, New York met with the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Louise Frechette, to discuss the vision and hiring process for the position of UN Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, and to share the mounting concerns from women's organizations about the delay in hiring for this position.

The meeting on 29 June 2004 was scheduled by the Office of the Secretary-General in response to a request to meet with him from women who had participated in the 48th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (1-12 March 2004). It was during the Commission that Ms. Angela King, who had served as the Special Adviser since 1997, announced her retirement, leaving many NGO participants concerned about the future of the position, created out of the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

Ms. Frechette made the following key points at the meeting:

- The appointment of the Special Adviser will be made soon. The Secretary-General has received names from inside and outside the UN system, and as it is necessary to factor in the availability of the Secretary-General and other senior officials for interviewing of the candidates, the hiring process has been slow.
- The Secretary-General will fill the position at the level of Assistant Secretary-General. No changes in the level and mandate of the Assistant-Secretary-General's post are anticipated, although the new appointee will, of course, want to shape her work according to her assessment of the current situation of gender mainstreaming in the UN system.
- The Secretary-General is looking for a woman who will bring to the position of Special Adviser vision and fresh ideas, as well as leadership and leverage within the UN system.
- National action is crucial to the greater integration of a gender perspective and the empowerment of women in the work of the UN. The women's movement, and civil society at-large, play a critical role in the creation of the UN agenda because it's the pressure of civil society that moves governments, and the UN is a reflection of governments.
- The Secretary-General can influence the advancement of women through his advocacy role, but it has to be connected to the actions taken by governments and civil society; thus, the Secretary-General needs to hear more from women and men in the women's movement.
- Gender issues at the Millennium Summit will be connected to what happens at the Beijing review and appraisal (March 2005). Ms. Frechette urged women's organizations to determine the two or three most crucial themes addressed during the Beijing review to highlight at the Millennium Summit.

**The organizations that participated in the 29 June meeting were Center for Women's Global Leadership of Rutgers University, NGO Committee on the Status of Women, NY, Women's Environment and Development Organization and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.*

***The organizations that had requested a meeting during the 48th Session of the Commission with the UN Secretary-General to discuss the position of the Special Adviser were African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Center for Women's Global Leadership, Hague Appeal for Peace, International Women's Tribune Centre, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, Women's Environment and Development Organization and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.*