

# Women and Gender: The Evolution of Women Specific Institutions and Gender Integration at the United Nations

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The principle of women's equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex was inscribed in the United Nations from the beginning through the UN Charter in 1945, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. These were unprecedented breakthroughs, but they did not happen without struggle. A handful of women delegates (from Asia, North and South America) attending the UN Charter Conference worked together with 42 non-governmental organizations to ensure inclusion of sex in the anti discrimination clause as well as to change 'equal rights among men' to 'equal rights among men and women.' A similar effort had to be made in the drafting of the UDHR.(1)

This example of women working across geographic boundaries as well as across the lines of governmental delegates, non-governmental organizations and UN staff members to advance equality is repeated often in the history of women and the UN. Precisely because the numbers of women in governmental delegations have been small, women's organizations and movements have played an important role in bringing the views of women into the UN.

Even the terms to use in this discussion are under debate, but the distinction between women and gender is important – and often misunderstood. “Women” are an identifiable group based on biological sex, while “gender” refers to the ways in which roles, attitudes, privileges, and relationships regarding women and men are socially constructed, and gender shapes the experience of males as well as females. For example, one can speak of the need to empower women as a defined group and to increase their numbers in decision-making, while gender is more appropriately used to talk about how social attitudes shape perceptions of issues and of who gets invited to the table. Men as well as women can be (or not be) “gender conscious.” To be aware of the impact of gender and committed to women's equality is at the core of a political perspective called “feminism.” As used in this chapter, these terms are overlapping but not synonymous.(2)

One of the ongoing dilemmas in work on this issue has been whether to pursue women's equality through separate entities or through the other UN bodies. Some have argued that without women specific units, these concerns would be neglected and women's efforts diluted, while others maintain that women will always be marginalized unless gender is mainstreamed into all areas of the UN. History indicates that both strategies are necessary, and indeed should be mutually reinforcing. This chapter explores how both have evolved and influenced each other.

Another dilemma has been where to place women and gender in terms of the UN's division of work. The obvious answer is everywhere as such a broad topic does not fall into one box – social, political or economic, rights or development, etc. As Devaki Jain points out in her book as part of the UN Intellectual History Project, one of women's contributions to the UN has been questioning the knowledge base with its embedded hierarchies and “critiquing ideas such as the dichotomies of development and rights, public and private, theory and practice, women's rights and human rights, home and workplace.”(3) The practical matter of where to place work on women/gender continues, but addressing the inter-relatedness of this topic has fared better as the UN has grappled with the overlapping nature of its work in development, human rights, peace, security, humanitarian affairs, etc.

This chapter cannot cover everything about women and gender in 60 years of the UN, much less reflect the vibrant work at the national and regional level, which has fed and been fed by the global. It does outline the major international institutions, standards, and trends as they have evolved: from the initial emphasis on political participation and citizenship to development/health in the 70's-80's and then human rights, peace and security, and gender integration in the 90's onward.

## **I. Women Specific Institutions, Conferences & Standard Setting**

Women specific entities and events have primarily driven the agenda on this topic in the UN and have served as the incubator for ideas about women's equality and gender to develop, and then often move into the mainstream. Without these, it is hard to imagine how this work would have progressed. Yet, women specific work has largely remained marginalized, and the miniscule resources and power invested in it has plagued efforts to achieve implementation of the high standards repeatedly espoused on this topic.(4)

**The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**, the UN inter-governmental policy body on women, was initially established in 1946 as a sub-commission of the Commission on Human Rights. There was debate amongst supporters about where to place women's rights, but after pressure from NGOs and an appeal by the chair of the sub-commission (Bodil Begtrup of Denmark) not to make women dependent on another Commission, where they would end up "in the queue" competing with many other human rights issues, it was made an independent entity that first met in 1947.(5)

The mandate of the CSW is to prepare policy recommendations and reports to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on promoting women in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields and on urgent problems of women's rights. The resources of the Commission are small, and it only met every other year until 1987, but it draws upon the active engagement of NGOs. NGOs have always been a significant presence at the CSW – averaging 30-50 in the 1950's and swelling by the 1990's to over 600 with the growth of civil society participation in the UN more generally.(6)

The early years of the CSW laid the groundwork for legal equality with a primary focus on political rights of women – including the right to vote and status in marriage, on access to education and vocational training, and on women's rights as workers. Several declarations and conventions were adopted building in particular on the pioneering work of the International Labor Organization (ILO), and in collaboration with UNESCO.(7) While weak on implementation, these documents began to set standards on women and were often accompanied by the gathering of statistics - the first real data globally on women's status – a critical role that the UN has continued to play, illustrated by numerous reports, including a 2005 report on the state of data in this field.(8)

The work of the CSW was transformed by the UN World Conferences on Women from 1975-95 discussed below. In 1987, it began to meet annually, as it was mandated to monitor implementation of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies from the '85 conference." Much of its work since has focused on monitoring implementation of both Nairobi and the Beijing Platform for Action from 1995, and on conducting the UN's five and ten year reviews of that conference.

**The Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)** is the current name of the unit in the UN Secretariat that provides substantive servicing to the CSW. Based in New York within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, it elaborates global policies and norms on women mandated by the CSW, ECOSOC, and the General Assembly, and conducts research, prepares reports, and develops policy options as needed. It also promotes and supports the mainstreaming of gender perspectives

within the UN system as well as provides substantive and technical servicing to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women discussed below. (See [www.un.org/womenwatch](http://www.un.org/womenwatch) for information on UN activities on women and gender specific websites in the UN)

**International Women's Year:** A number of factors converged leading to the declaration of 1975 as International Women's Year (IWY), and of '76-85 as the UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development, and Peace. The UN had designated several theme years and the second UN Development Decade had just begun when the Women's International Democratic Federation suggested designating a women's year to the CSW.(9) Proposed by Eastern and Western European women concerned with peace during the Cold War, many women in North and South America in the midst of a feminist resurgence took it up with enthusiasm. Meanwhile women from newly independent states in the Third World saw it as an opportunity to address women's role in development and move the work of the CSW "beyond the negotiating tables in New York and Geneva and into the fields and rice paddies of the developing world."(10)

The first **World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975** was tumultuous and ground breaking in bringing global attention to a multitude of issues raised by the 8000+ people who attended the conference and/or the NGO parallel Tribune. Government delegations - 73% female and primarily headed by women – brought many into the orbit of the UN for the first time; both events introduced activists to the potential of pursuing their interests through the UN, at a time when there were few international venues for women's rights. The conference developed a Plan of Action and, recognizing that a year was hardly enough, called for a UN Decade for Women. Further, over 100 governments set up "national institutions" dealing with policy, research and programs on women during IWY.(11)

Awareness-raising about women's status prevailed even amidst differences in Mexico, but the **Mid-decade Conference on Women in Copenhagen in 1980** brought out the heat in debates North-South, as well as over political divisions, especially around Israel. Nevertheless, especially at the NGO Forum, women listened and networked - a learning experience that prepared the groundwork for greater understanding of the enormous diversity of women and their needs.(12)

The **Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985** ushered in the era of the international women's movement, with its multitude of diverse regional and global manifestations. Women's groups and feminist leaders had been emerging over the decade in all regions, and more Southern voices now took center stage. For example, DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) – a new Southern network of researchers - launched its feminist critique of development in Nairobi.(13) The vibrant NGO forum embraced women's diversity as strength and reflected the growing consensus that all issues are women's issues and all would benefit from gender analysis. The "Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women Towards 2000" coming out of the Inter-governmental conference contained a detailed and sophisticated approach to what achieving women's equality required.

The UN Decade for Women proved to be an enormous catalyst for women's organizing, providing resources, space, and legitimization of the issue nationally, as well as bringing women together regionally and globally. As Peggy Antrobus notes: "It was within this context that women from around the world first encountered each other in a sustained and ever-deepening process...[that] was to nurture and expand this movement in a way that not even its strongest protagonists could have imagined."(14)

The **Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995** showcased this movement and consolidated its gains on the UN agenda. The largest UN conference held to date, it had delegations from 189 governments and 17,000 (governments, NGOs, journalists, and UN personnel) in attendance.

Meanwhile some 35,000+ people attended the NGO Forum.<sup>(15)</sup> Beijing illustrated the enormous interest in this topic globally as well as exposed its controversial aspects and the growing political strength of opponents to women's rights. The Beijing Platform for Action covers the human rights of women in 12 critical areas of concern, ranging from poverty and education to violence against women and armed conflict, and including the girl child – a topic that African women advanced.<sup>(16)</sup> There have been no more world conferences on women, but the CSW has conducted two well attended reviews of implementation of the Beijing Platform – in 2000 and 2005. Both of these events reaffirmed the Platform and added to it in areas, such as HIV/Aids, but they are less bold in spirit and reflect the impact that conservative forces have had on governments' attitudes toward women's issues, especially in areas like sexual and reproductive rights.<sup>(17)</sup>

**The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)** began as the Voluntary Fund for the UN Decade for Women in 1976 to promote the Decade and support implementation in developing countries of the Mexico City Plan of Action. As the only UN Fund mandated solely to assist women, it is a catalyst both within the UN system and through support to innovative activities at the national level. In 1984, it was made a separate operational entity, renamed UNIFEM and placed in association with the UN Development Programme (UNDP). With headquarters in New York, it has regional offices and is linked to UN development activities at the country level. The scope of UNIFEM's work has expanded with a growing understanding of what is vital to development for women, and now includes programmes on women and governance, peace, security and violence against women as well as economic justice.<sup>(18)</sup>

**The International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)**, also came out of a recommendation in Mexico City, and was created in 1976 but then established its headquarters in the Dominican Republic in 1983. INSTRAW carries out research programmes related to gender and development in areas, such as valuing women's household production, and identifies gaps in order to promote further studies. It also conducts training seminars and has elaborated training materials and methodologies related to research on gender and development.

**The Office of the Special Advisor to the Secretary General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)** resulted from a recommendation made at the Beijing Conference that there should be a higher level gender post (Assistant Secretary General) who reported directly to the SG. The office provides leadership for the work on gender mainstreaming and for the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, as well as for the Inter-Agency Task Force on Women, Peace, and Security. It also includes the Focal Point for Women in the Secretariat which works to improve the status of women internally within the UN.

**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women** – adopted in 1981 as part of the advances made during the Decade for Women, CEDAW or the Women's Convention as it is commonly called, is the key international legal instrument on women's rights. CEDAW incorporates the provisions on sex discrimination in previous UN conventions and spells out social and economic as well as political and civil rights for women, addressing the private as well as public sphere. Ratified by 180 governments to date, this treaty also has the largest number of reservations, reflecting state's ambivalence about many of the provisions including the very concept of discrimination, and especially with regard to culture, family, and reproductive rights.

CEDAW also provides for a Treaty-monitoring body that meets several times a year in New York to hear and comment on governmental reports on their obligations under the treaty. The CEDAW Committee also receives information from NGOs about what governments have done (or not done), and many NGOs have produced "shadow" or alternative reports which they use to pressure

governments and call attention to issues nationally. In 2000, the Convention was strengthened when an Optional Protocol was adopted that allows the committee to hear and act on complaints from individuals on violations of the Convention in countries that have ratified the protocol.

**Violence Against Women (VAW) on the UN Agenda** – while some aspects of VAW, such as trafficking and harmful traditional practices, had been addressed by the UN earlier, generally VAW was still seen as private and not taken up substantially by the UN until the 1990's. For example, VAW was not mentioned in CEDAW and UNIFEM had to commission a concept paper to justify funding projects on this topic as late as 1991. (19) However, work on VAW has advanced rapidly in the past decade, reflecting innovations in standard setting that cross over women specific/general lines, public/private, and demonstrate its cross-cutting nature.

The primary standard setting, but non-binding, instrument is the **Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW)** developed over several years by CSW/DAW and adopted by the GA in 1993. DEVAW identifies violence in three spheres: family, community, and state. In 1992, the CEDAW Committee adopted a General Recommendation affirming that VAW is a form of sex discrimination, and thus, should be included in states' reports. UNIFEM initiated the InterAgency Trust Fund on the Elimination of VAW in 1996, which provides resources in this area. The most comprehensive cross-cultural data on VAW has been collected by the World Health Organization,(20) and the GA called for a Secretary General's report on the topic to be presented in 2006, illustrating that gender has moved onto mainstream UN agendas – at least somewhat.

## **II. Gender Integration and Women's Advances on UN Agendas**

Women and gender perspectives have been propelled forward by women specific entities, but they have influenced and been advanced in other areas of the UN as well. Gender integration received a big push from the international women's movement in the 1990's, when Antrobus argues feminists changed the terms and outcomes of global debates "in ways that clarified linkages between social, cultural, economic and political factors and pointed the way to more credible solutions to problems of environmental degradation, sustainable livelihoods, poverty, human rights and population." (21) During this decade, the UN mandated 'gender mainstreaming' described as "a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes.... so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated." (22) Most UN agencies created gender focal points and/or programs in this area, if they did not already have them. Much has been gained from mainstreaming, but it should not be seen as a substitute for women specific work which must pioneer new issues and be an unconditional advocate for women. Since this chapter cannot cover all the complexity of gender integration throughout the UN, it highlights four major areas.

**Development** – Given the importance of development within the UN and in the Women's Decade, it has been addressed by women extensively for some time. Jain contends that women "brought new ways of looking at the conceptualization of work; challenged the hierarchies of how economic and social contributions are valued; insisted that women have a right to development ...and that the degree of access of women...was a measure of the stage of development of a nation." (23) Initially labeled "women in development (WID)," this work built upon Ester Boserup's 1970 study of women's work that provided evidence of their crucial (but often unrecognized) role in national economic activity and helped to legitimize looking at women's productive (and reproductive) roles in development processes. The integration of women in development was recognized in the plans for the UN's second Development Decade (1970-80) and became a focus not only of the CSW, but also of the Commission for Social Development (CSD) and of the UN's regional commissions.(24)

Planners began to recognize the importance of women to the success of development and the need to include them in design and country-level implementation. More attention focused on women's education as key to family improvement, and on micro-finance for women's enterprises, through institutions such as Women's World Banking, the Grameen Bank, and other similar initiatives. But as the feminization of poverty continued, a feminist critique emerged that went beyond women's inclusion to looking at how gender was inscribed in models of development in a way that disadvantaged women. This "Gender and Development" (GAD rather than WID) approach put more emphasis on the need to change models of development.(25)

In the 1990's, as women organized to bring feminist critiques into mainstream UN World Conferences, the first to see this impact was the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. Women held their own World Congress in advance of Rio, prepared a Women's Agenda 21 and then lobbied to ensure that their perspectives were included in the conference's analysis of environmental degradation – linking it to sustainable development and other "economic, political, social and cultural factors."(26) At the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995, women again brought their critiques of development – linking the feminization of poverty to the impact of structural adjustment and unfair trade policies. The Secretary General of the UN at the time concluded that Copenhagen "was the international community's most forthright acknowledgement that the problems faced by women lie at the heart of the global agenda."(27) Women's growing influence was also reflected in the decision of the UNDP Human Development Report in 1995 to focus on "Gender and Human Development," where it launched the Gender Development Index to measure women's status.

Yet, in 2000 women again found themselves marginalized at the Millennium Summit. Gender equality was one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) developed out of the Summit, but the only concrete target set for it was equal access to primary education. The other MDG focused on women - decreasing maternal mortality - only addresses women as child bearers. During the period from 2000-05, many feminists spent time with the MDG task forces, expanding the gender equality MDG into seven key target areas and seeking to bring gender perspectives into the others. Nevertheless, the first draft for the Millennium Summit +5 document again failed to address the centrality of women's rights to this process, containing only passing reference to gender equality. Once again, women mobilized to bring gender more fully onto the agenda, concluding after the summit that gains had been made but that governments and the UN still fell far short of both the development and the gender equality goals espoused. (28)

**Health** – Gender has been raised as part of the health concerns of the UN in a number of areas, such as the work on VAW done by WHO, attention to maternal mortality in WHO and UNFPA, and sex discrimination in food and health care provided to girls taken up by UNICEF and FAO. An increasingly important area where there is growing awareness within the UN of its gendered dimensions is the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Females are the most vulnerable and fastest growing segment of those with HIV, especially in Africa. UNAIDS has begun to address this with initiatives like the UN/NGO partnership in the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS.

The most controversial aspects of health raised in the context of the UN concern sexual and reproductive health and rights. These issues were discussed as far back the UN Conference on Human Rights in Teheran in 1968, the World Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974, and the Women's Conference in 1975. The CSW appointed a Special Rapporteur to study the interrelationship of the status of women and family planning in 1968, Helvi Sipilä, who also informally organized women in governments to ensure that women's status was on the Bucharest agenda.(29)

An understanding of the centrality of women's rights to issues of population evolved over two decades of debates, during which time women's health movements had made strong critiques of family planning abuses and coercive practices. The paradigm shift was embodied in the Plan of Action from the ICPD Conference in Cairo in 1994, which in the words of Rosalind Petchesky: "moves firmly from an approach based on demographic targets...to a comprehensive reproductive health approach;...integrates women's empowerment into population and development strategies; and ...recognizes reproductive rights as fundamental human rights."(30) The Cairo agenda has been shepherded by UNFPA, one of the strongest advocates for women's rights in the UN system, which has been punished by a withdrawal of financial support from the US Bush administration as a consequence.

The discussion of sexual rights has arisen in the UN both within the context of health and human rights, as well as in the world conferences on women. As a concept, it is implicit in the Vienna, Cairo, and Beijing World Conference documents, where reference is made to the right to control over one's sexuality. However, a number of governments have been repudiating the concept of sexual rights as well as seeking to limit reproductive rights in a highly vocal backlash over the past few years at the UN.(31) One of the most controversial aspects of sexual rights is the assertion of the right to live free from violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation – a concept that has been raised by a few special rapporteurs and discussed at the Commission on Human Rights in recent years, but not acted upon.

**Human Rights** – With the CSW autonomous and separated from the UN human rights machinery based in Geneva, women were primarily seen as part of the social and economic work of the UN, and women's rights were only rarely addressed in the human rights arena of the UN before the 1990s. While some women argued for an understanding of their rights as human rights for many years, the change in this perception came most forcefully at the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993. With the cold war over and the issue of rape in war gaining media coverage in Bosnia, women seized the opportunity to demand attention to women's rights as human rights. They organized across the North-South divide and in all the regional preparatory processes to ensure that the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action included a strong affirmation of the rights of women as universal human rights and in particular for the recognition that all forms of violence against women are a violation of human rights.(32)

One of the specific demands in Vienna was for a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences to report to the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in Geneva. This Rapporteur was appointed in 1994, and her annual reports have elaborated human rights standards on VAW and outlined government's responsibilities to abide by those standards in concrete policy terms, following the parameters outlined in the UN Declaration on VAW.(33)

Another call from Vienna was for gender integration into all the work of the human rights machinery - the subject of a resolution each year at the CHR since 1994. Vienna also resulted in the appointment a High Commissioner for Human Rights to elevate attention to human rights in the world, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has included a mandate for gender integration from its inception. Over the past decade, a growing number of human rights treaty bodies and special procedures have given attention to the gendered aspects of their mandates.

For example, the UN Human Rights Committee which monitors the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) issued General Comment 28 on the equality of rights between men and women, which spells out how this violates the ICCPR.(34) Other treaty bodies are also addressing how gender affects their mandates on Torture, Racial Discrimination, Child Rights, and Economic and Social Rights. Considerable attention has been paid to gender integration and women in the work of a number

of the UN Special Rapporteurs in areas, such as Internally Displaced Persons, Migrants, Housing, Extra Judicial and Summary Executions and in the work of the Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders. ([www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org))

Another gender related issue addressed by several bodies in the UN over the years is trafficking in persons, and especially women, involving both sexual and economic exploitation. This chapter cannot cover the extensive debates over trafficking that involve questions of prostitution, sex work, human rights, migration and immigration, etc. The 1949 Convention on this subject was prepared by the Social Committee of the GA, and trafficking is also covered in CEDAW and in the Beijing Platform. Different aspects of this topic are addressed by the OHCHR, ILO, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the UN Crime Commission. An operative definition is contained in the Palermo Protocol that supplements the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime adopted in 2000. In 2004, the CHR appointed a Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially in Women and Children.(35)

The ongoing tension within the UN between the principle of the universality of human rights and respect for cultural specificity, and between the responsibility of the international community to enforce respect for human rights and national sovereignty comes up often when addressing the human rights of women. Many UN documents consistently state variation on the idea that while cultural and religious diversity is to be respected, it is not to be used as justification for violating human rights, including the rights of women. But the debate continues, and no where are the stakes of this debate clearer than in the resistance often experienced in seeking to realize the human rights of women.(36)

**Peace and Security** – One of the first issues that women's NGOs addressed in the early days of the UN was peace; it was a prominent theme in the UN Decade for Women, and in 1974, the GA adopted a Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict.(37) Nevertheless, not until the 1990s did real changes come in international law in this area and efforts to alter the traditional approach to peace-keeping and security as male terrain begin to get a hearing in the UN.

By the early 1990s, women's groups around the world had brought VAW in many forms out of the closet. The recognition of rape as a systematic tool of war was spurred on by the rapes in Bosnia and by the Korean former "comfort women" who broke the silence about their subjugation to military sexual slavery by the Japanese in World War II. Both of these situations were highlighted in women's organizing at Vienna in 1993, and helped gain global attention to VAW in armed conflict there as well as in Beijing. Soon after, the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia began to prosecute rape and sexual violence as war crimes, and the Tribunal for Rwanda prosecuted rape as genocide.

When negotiations for the Rome Statute to create an International Criminal Court got underway, women organized the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice to ensure that sexual and gender crimes were included. As a founder of the Caucus explains: "The Rome Statute names a broad range of sexual and reproductive violence crimes – rape, sexual slavery including trafficking, forced pregnancy, enforced prostitution, enforced sterilization...as among the gravest crimes of war....and [as] crimes against humanity....[It] also encompasses groundbreaking structures and processes to ensure that crimes will be prosecuted in a nondiscriminatory, respectful manner that minimizes the potential for retraumatization and overcomes women's reluctance to participate."(38)

Another major gender integration advance was the unanimous passage of Security Council Resolution 1325 on 31 October 2000. This is the first resolution by the Security Council that specifically addresses the impact of war on women and recognizes women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. It adds to the growing attention to VAW in war, and also calls for involving greater



numbers of women in both peace-making and peace-building activities. In 2002, the Secretary General made a special report on women, peace, and security and work to implement this resolution is a focus of OSAGI and UNIFEM, as well as of many NGOs.(39)

Gender awareness has also grown in humanitarian assistance. For example, UNHCR began to recognize refugee women as a particular group and issued guidelines on the protection of refugee women in 1992 and for preventing and responding to sexual violence against refugees in 1995. Implementation of such guidelines on the ground amongst both UN and NGO humanitarian workers continues to be the challenge. This challenge was made more explicit as the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse by both UN peacekeepers and NGO personnel was exposed recently. In response, the Secretary General of the UN commissioned a report on strategies to eliminate abuses in UN peacekeeping, which has resulted in the establishment of specialized units addressing personnel conduct issues in UN missions and the strengthening of mechanisms for investigation and sanction of such abuse.(40) Thus the UN is seeking to address issues of women, peace and security both internally and as the body the world hopes will help to prevent such human rights abuse.

In conclusion, an assessment of where women's rights and gender equality stand in the UN after the World Summit in 2005 is a half full versus half empty question. Much has progressed since women first fought for their inclusion in the UN Charter, but after 60 years of struggle, one could expect more as well from the body whose power depends on its moral authority and should be leading by example. The UN internal mandate of 50/50 males/females in positions of power by 2000 agreed upon at the Beijing Conference in 1995 has progressed very little; women still make up less than 30% of higher level professional posts and that percentage gets lower the higher up you go.(41) The continuing gender imbalance at the upper levels of the UN, and in the governments that make up its member states, points to the need for women and male allies to keep bringing these issues forward.

As part of the UN reform process, considerable discussion took place in 2006 about the need to strengthen the UN's work on women's rights and its "gender architecture." A major proposal to consolidate DAW, OSAGI, and UNIFEM into one stronger women's agency with more resources was recommended by the Secretary General's High Level Panel on Coherence in November and endorsed by Kofi Anan as well as by many women's NGOs. In 2007, the GA will decide how to act on this proposal which could alter considerably the units described here. Both this decision and how vigorously the mandate for "gender mainstreaming" is pursued under the new Secretary General will be significant markers for the UN's work in this area in the future.

The next test will be how governments and the UN proceed to integrate gender and advance women in the newly created Peace Building Commission, in the Human Rights Council and in attempts to implement the MDGs. The UN remains an important arena in women's pursuit of justice and human rights; progress globally has repercussions nationally, and vice versa. The UN has provided a venue where high standards around gender equality and the human rights of women have been elaborated, but the challenge is how to implement these goals within the UN, and in the every day lives of women and girls around the world.

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