

News Release

 Women's Environment
& Development Organization

Center for Women's  Global Leadership

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GENDER EQUALITY MAY FINALLY ARRIVE AT UNITED NATIONS

Panel Report Responds to Women's Demands, Groups Release Statement

New York, NY – A high-level panel convened by United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan will recommend the creation of a stronger agency for women in its report to be issued on Thursday Nov 9. For months, women's groups and allies around the world have actively lobbied governments and Panel members for the creation of this new agency to strengthen the UN's response to gender inequality. Over 90 groups worldwide have signed on to a statement released today praising the Panel's recommendations.

"We and our colleagues around the world are pleased that one of the Panel's boldest recommendations is for an independent women's agency that will strengthen the UN's capacity, leadership and resources for gender equality," said June Zeitlin, Executive Director of Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO). "As we told the Panel members, there is a tremendous gap between rhetoric at the UN on gender equality and the reality of women's lives. We believe that this consolidated agency will provide a stronger voice for women at both the global and country level."

The women's agency will consolidate three existing women's units within the UN—Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)—and will be headed by a newly created Under-Secretary General. The agency head will have higher status, a substantially increased budget and additional staff for its work at global and country levels.

By enthusiastically endorsing the Panel's recommendations, current Secretary General Kofi Annan could signal the importance of gender equality to the UN mission to fight poverty, provide humanitarian aid and protect the environment. The Panel's recommendations also present an unprecedented opportunity for incoming Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon to take decisive political action on behalf of women worldwide.

"These structural recommendations will only be meaningful if there is also significant political will—including financial and human resources—for their implementation" said Charlotte Bunch, Executive Director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University. "For years, women from around the globe have been calling on

governments and the UN to strengthen their efforts to realize the rights of women that UN documents have codified, and this is a good move in that direction. Now the baton passes to Mr. Ban Ki Moon to ensure that the UN takes bold steps to support the Panel's recommendations in practice and not in name only."

To make this real, women demand assurances that this agency have strength at both global policy and country "on the ground" levels.

"We demand that all UN country teams include senior gender expertise including at the decision making level, with adequate resources and not just where necessary," said Bene Madunagu, General Coordinator of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). "Women's rights are not optional and should not be subject to the will of this or that donor interested only in this or that country."

The time for gender equality at the UN is now. Several global women's leaders will hold a press briefing today at 2pm in the UN Press Room (S-226) in New York. Speakers include: Bani Dugal of Baha'i International Community to the United Nations; Doris Mpoumou on behalf of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN); Cynthia Rothschild of the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), and June Zeitlin of the Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO).

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Since 1990, Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) has fostered women's leadership in the area of human rights through women's global leadership institutes, strategic planning activities, international mobilization campaigns, UN monitoring, global education endeavors, publications, and a resource center. For more information, visit www.cwgl.rutgers.edu. Center for Women's Global Leadership / Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey / 160 Ryders Lane / New Brunswick, NJ / 08901 / USA / +1 732.932.8782.

WEDO is an international organization that advocates for women's equality in global policy. Working in key global forums such as the UN, WEDO advocates for and seeks to empower women as decision makers to achieve economic, social and gender justice, a healthy, peaceful planet and human rights for all. For more information, visit www.wedo.org. WEDO / 355 Lexington Ave., 3rd Floor / New York, NY / 10017 / USA / +1 212.9730325.

Statement on Reforming the Gender Equality Architecture of the United Nations

Women's groups from around the world welcome the recommendations on strengthening the gender equality architecture of the UN in the report released November 9, 2006 by the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel for UN System-wide Coherence. We urge member states to adopt these recommendations during the 61st session of the General Assembly and to set up a process to ensure their full and timely implementation.

We support the Panel's proposal to establish an independent women-specific entity that will combine OSAGI, DAW and UNIFEM, have both normative and operational responsibilities, be better resourced, and be led by an Under-Secretary General. These recommendations are in line with what civil society, and in particular women's groups, have been calling for to enable governments and the UN system to better achieve their goals on gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights.

We are pleased that the Panel adopted the recommendation for a USG to head the new entity, as it will guarantee organizational stature and a voice for women at the UN decision-making tables. Women's groups called for an open, transparent and global search for a candidate who has substantive expertise in gender equality and we are pleased that the report includes this recommendation. We urge that civil society be consulted during this open search process.

The dual mandate of the new entity, which will include both policy and country-level functions, will strengthen the effectiveness of the gender mainstreaming work of other UN agencies, as well as advance women's rights directly. For this entity to function as a driving force throughout the UN system, and for it to better address women's experiences at the country level, every UN Country Team must include senior-level gender equality experts with adequate resources and support who can lead the team's efforts to fulfill and promote UN and government commitments to women's human rights.

A strong and well-resourced institutional accountability mechanism that enables women's participation and addresses women's rights in activities at the country level was one of the critical needs presented to the Coherence Panel.

The time to show support for a reformed and strengthened women's entity is now. Women's groups urge governments to demonstrate political will during the General Assembly by endorsing the Coherence Panel's recommendations on creating a stronger gender equality architecture at the UN, and by establishing and adhering to a process and time frame for implementation.

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Signatories (as of 08 November 2006)

Association of Women's NGOs of Uzbekistan
Action Canada for Population and Development
Advocates for Youth
African Women's Development Fund
Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Bangladesh
Amnesty International
Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)
Asia Pacific Women's Watch
Asociacion Chilena de Proteccion de la Familia (APROFA), Chile
Asociación Panameña para el Planeamiento de la Familia, Panama
Associazione Italiana Donne per lo Sviluppo (AIDOS) , Italy
Australian Reproductive Health Alliance
AWID
Baha'i International
Bem-Estar Familiar no Brasil (BEMFAM), Brazil
Canadian Union of Public Employees
Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir, Mexico
Center for Reproductive Rights
Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL)
Centre for Policy Research and Analysis (CPRA), Nepal
CEPIA- Cidadania Estudos Pesquisa Informaçao Acao, Brazil
Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Asia Pacific
Communication Foundation for Asia
Concertación Interamericana de Mujeres Activistas (CIMA), Costa Rica
DAWN
El Closet de Sor Juana, Mexico
Equality Now
Feminist Caucus of the American Humanist Association
Feminist League, Kazakhstan
Foro de Mujeres y Política de Población, Mexico
Fundacion Arcoiris, Mexico
Fundacion Mexicana para la Planeacion Familiar (MEXFAM), Mexico
Fundacion para Estudio e Investigacion de la Mujer (FEIM), Argentina
Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute, The Philippines
Global Fund for Women
Indonesian Center For Women in Politics (ICWIP)
INFORM, Sri Lanka
Institute for Reproductive Health, The Philippines
Instituto de Estudios Comparados en Ciencias Penales y Sociales, Argentina
International Center for Research on Women
International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI)
International Planned Parenthood Federation - Western Hemisphere Region (IPPF-WHR)
International Women's Health Coalition
International Women's Rights Action Watch - Asia Pacific
IPAS
Isis International

Japan Women's Watch
K.U.L.U. Women and Development, Denmark
Korea Women's Political Caucus
Kvinna till Kvinna, Sweden
MADRE
Mujer y Salud en Uruguay (MYSU)
Mulabi- Espacio Latinoamericano de Sexualidades y Derechos, Argentina
Network of Women in Politics, Indonesia
New Zealand Council for International Development
New Zealand Family Planning Association
North East Network, India
Norwegian Network for Women and the UN
Oxfam International
Public Services International
Radio Internacional Feminsita (FIRE)
Red de Salud de las Mujeres Latinoamericanas y del Caribe (RSMLAC)
Red por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos en México
REDESS Jovenes, Peru
Rights & Democracy - Droits et Démocratie, Canada
Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre, Toronto, Canada
Rozaan, Pakistan
Saathi - South Asia
Shirkat Gah-Women's Resource Center, Pakistan
South Asia Forum of Professionals Against Trafficking (SAPAT)
SouthEast Asia Women Watch (SEAWWatch)
Temiksaming Native Women's Support Group, Canada
Thai Women Watch
The Open Society Institute
Toronto Women's Call to Action, Canada
Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, Canada
UNIFEM/USA
WOMANKIND Worldwide
Women & Environments International Magazine -- Editorial Board, Canada
Women for Change, Zambia
Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF)
Women in Peacebuilding Network -- Africa (WIPNET-A)
Women's Rights Division of Human Rights Watch
Women's Advocacy Coalition, Vanuatu
Women's Edge Coalition
Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)
Women's Feature Service Philippines
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
World Population Foundation
Yellowknife Women's Society, Canada
Yukon Status of Women Council