

GENDER EQUALITY NOW OR NEVER:

A NEW UN AGENCY FOR WOMEN

Office of the UN Special Envoy for AIDS in Africa

July 2006

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Note to readers: This paper uses the word "agency" colloquially and generically, to refer to the UN's "specialized agencies" as well as its funds, programmes and other entities.

GENDER EQUALITY NOW OR NEVER:

A NEW UN AGENCY FOR WOMEN

PART ONE

1. INTRODUCTION: THE UN'S HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

“Every social grouping in the world has specific traditional cultural practices and beliefs, some of which are beneficial to all members, while others are harmful to a specific group, such as women...

Despite their harmful nature and their violation of international human rights laws, such practices persist because they are not questioned and take on an aura of morality in the eyes of those practising them.”

The systematic oppression of women is among the most destructive cultural practices of all time, and yet social groupings the world over have embraced it. The UN is no exception. Its culture – evident in employment, in decision-making, and in allocating resources – is harmful to women. It's time to remove the UN's 'aura of morality'.

The UN is undergoing reform for maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

Member States will be guided by recommendations submitted to the General Assembly by a 15-member High-Level Panel, appointed in February to bring system-wide coherence to the UN's international machinery and its processes. The “Coherence Panel” (12 male appointees; 3 female) will not have to spend its time discussing the purpose, the goals or the aims of the United Nations: that work was done long ago, beginning in 1945 with the founding UN Charter, and since elaborated, strengthened, reiterated and fine-tuned countless times, in many hundreds of conventions, treaties, and declarations, plans of action, resolutions and mandates. Despite the updates, the world's governments have never wavered from the original Charter. For 61 years, they have been declaring their allegiance to the principle that men and women are absolute equals, and reiterating their commitment to putting those words into practice. The 61st

Session of the General Assembly will be led by Her Excellency Ambassador Haya Rashed Al Khalifa of Bahrain – notably, just the third woman ever to be elected President of the General Assembly.

Unlike children and the frail elderly, women aren't naturally in need of protection. But like subjugated groups throughout history, women have been overpowered. Women need protection from the *unnatural* order imposed on our universe – the manmade laws, customs, practices and indulgences that rule modern “civilization”. They have the aptitude, but are denied the wherewithal to devise and construct their own protections.

A UN women's agency would, for the first time, begin to right the balance. Operational, with on-the-ground presence in every country, a guaranteed budget, and a full complement of expert staff and targeted programmes, a women's agency would immediately begin to redress decades of UN neglect. Far from speaking *for* women, a dedicated agency with convening power would ensure that women's own voices can be heard, at all levels of society, and in the decisions that affect their lives.

A women's agency would not replace the current gender and women-targeted programmes being carried out by UN agencies. Instead it would encourage more such programmes, and would help *all* UN departments, agencies, funds and programmes to bring a gender perspective to *all* of their work. It would recognize that charting an effective path towards women's advancement and gender equality is a social science, and its practitioners are trained, schooled, experienced specialists with particular skills in vital fields, which are needed to make all UN policies and programmes truly effective. A women's agency would conduct targeted programmes for women's empowerment alongside “gender mainstreaming” as that strategy was originally conceived: a bona fide means of transforming societies into places where men and women live as equals.

A women's agency would need a headquarters staffed with technical experts and a budget adequate to support country offices with full operational capacity. Its country-level staff should be able to harness the local, national, regional and international expertise and resources needed to assess and address the needs of women. It should have the capacity to collect and analyze data on women's lives and rights; to develop policy; to provide technical advice and assistance on gender and women's empowerment in every specialized field; to support and monitor the gender-related work of other UN agencies; and to work closely with government partners to plan and oversee programmes at the national level.

2. WHY CREATE ANOTHER AGENCY?

A December 2004 assessment of UNIFEM by experts including the former head and deputy head of UNFPA and UNICEF compared the women's fund with other agencies, and concluded that, *"All agencies studied show that the existence of a visible and well positioned entity is a requirement for leading a United Nations coordinated approach on a particular issue."*ⁱ

The lack of a women's agency is preventing all the other agencies from fulfilling their mandates. Relegating half the global population to second-class status has created insuperable social and economic burdens that weigh us down en route to all our goals. And as the world grows more sophisticated and complex, it needs *all* of its human resources to survive and thrive. The status quo impedes and endangers us all.

The real financial question is not whether governments can afford an agency that empowers women, but whether they can afford to keep throwing Official Development Assistance at programmes that can't possibly succeed unless women are empowered.

In maternal health terms alone, the human costs of inaction will be roughly 2.5 million maternal deaths and 49 million pregnancy-related disabilities and illnesses in the next ten years in Africa.ⁱⁱ From child survival to AIDS prevention, diversified crops to safe cities, potable water to nuclear medicine, literacy to conflict prevention, the pursuit of every single global goal – including each of the Millennium Development Goals -- is doubly hard to achieve because the full potential of half the population can't be tapped.

The UN's Member States consistently find reasons – almost always financial -- *not* to employ the "international machinery" that would be needed to bring about equality between men and women. The fact that women are a low priority for the UN is well known: governments know it, the Secretary-General knows it, the women who staff and lead the UN's current "women's machinery" know it, and women's NGOs and gender equality advocates know it. More to the point, those who wage wars that target civilians know it, those who use rape as a weapon of war know it, those who let domestic violence go unchecked and unpunished know it, those who engage in sexual harassment and sexual coercion and sex-based discrimination know it, those who pay women less than men for work of equal value know it, those who deny women land ownership and inheritance and access to bank accounts and driver's licenses and leadership positions and political offices know it, those who mutilate the genitals of young girls know it, those who stone to death one half of an adulterous couple know it -- and they are all content with the UN's laissez-faire approach. The vast majority of the male world knows it -- a majority whose attitudes or actions toward women are, to some degree, biased or discriminatory or harmful or vile or criminal. And because

those attitudes and actions are encouraged by a UN that doesn't react, that majority is content.

Slavery, colonial rule, apartheid – at certain points in history, allowing the intolerable to persist becomes an act of criminal complicity. Governments can no longer avoid the truth: when it comes to women, we have reached that point.

3. AIDS: PROOF THAT GENDER INEQUALITY KILLS

The work of a 2004 UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change demonstrated that even the influence of the highest-ranking women in the UN's hierarchy is deflated by the numbers game. The panel was made up of 16 members, four of them women, and three of those were female former heads of UN agencies at the Under Secretary-General level. Despite the promising title of the panel's final report and recommendations, "*A more secure world: Our shared responsibility*", and its recognition that, "Little has been done to address the gender aspects of the Millennium Development Goals," the word "women" appears in just seven of the 302 paragraphs that make up the body of the report, and in three of its 101 recommendations.

If the gap between words and actions – policy and implementation – is not clear enough on paper, then AIDS is all the proof we need that ignoring women's needs and rights is fatal.

"I would never have considered myself a 'radical feminist', but my outlook has changed dramatically after seeing the suffering endured by women in the developing world."

James P. Morris, Executive Director, UN World Food Programⁱⁱⁱ

Women first caught up with men in sub-Saharan Africa's AIDS statistics 18 years ago. It was obvious then that the virus was exploiting women's low social and economic status, their lack of autonomy in sexual matters and their deficient access to everything from basic health care to awareness of current events. But the UN was virtually non-responsive to the gender dimensions of the pandemic for the next decade, during which millions of women became infected, additional millions died, and tens of millions more rushed to save the struggling continent, tending the ill, burying the dead and raising the children left behind.

Largely unrecognized, undocumented, and overwhelmingly uncompensated, the women of Africa continue to weave an extraordinary voluntary safety net of care and support under the crumbling societies that have treated them so poorly. Girls and young women now make up over three-quarters of the region's 15-24 year-olds infected with HIV; getting married and having children have become dangerous occupations for women, who are rarely able to demand or even assess their husbands' fidelity; and an entire generation of grandmothers has

assumed the role of foster parents to their children's orphaned children with no assistance whatsoever from the United Nations.

Eleven "pilot projects" were initiated by UNICEF in 1998^{iv} to introduce a newly discovered short-course treatment for the prevention of "mother-to-child transmission" of HIV (terminology that persists, over objections that it points a finger of blame at mothers). But access to the simple treatment, which cuts in half the risk that an infected mother's virus will be transmitted to her baby, has increased at a snail's pace in spite of a pharmaceutical company's offer to supply the drugs worldwide for free. In December 2005, UNAIDS documented the lack of progress: "prevention service coverage was about 5 per cent in the 30 African countries with the highest HIV prevalence in 2003."^v

As late as 2004, a first report was produced by the "Secretary-General's Task Force on Women, Girls and HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa", which had been formed a short time earlier in response to concerns that women were being neglected in the UN's work on AIDS. Although narrowed from a continent-wide task force to one that would focus on just nine countries, the Task Force and its report came up with concrete recommendations that, if implemented, would have amounted to a serious plan of action on gender and women in some of the continent's most heavily affected countries. But with no agency in-country to coax and guide those recommendations into action, the plans now largely sit on shelves, unfunded and unimplemented.

This neglect is not benign. Eight years earlier, in 1996, UNAIDS was formed as the UN's "joint response to HIV/AIDS" to coordinate the work of six co-sponsoring organizations; the membership has since grown to ten. UNIFEM's request to join UNAIDS as a co-sponsor was denied by UNDP; the fund was not a full-fledged agency, and UNDP would therefore represent the gender portfolio among the co-sponsors.

Rather than *guarantee* UNIFEM an independent place at the UN's decision-making table, a May 2006 report from the Executive Board states that, "UNDP is open to UNIFEM participation as a part of the UNDP delegation in high-level meetings such as those of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating board..."^{vi}

It should come as no surprise, then, that women are excluded at the national level. This statement appears in the UNAIDS 2006, 10th anniversary Report on the Global AIDS Pandemic:

"Women must be adequately represented in policy- and decision-making on AIDS. A 2004 UNAIDS assessment found that women's participation in the development and review of national AIDS frameworks was non-existent in more than 10 per cent of 79 countries and inadequate in more than 80 per cent."^{vii}

So-called “gender mainstreaming” has most definitely not spread responsibility for addressing women and AIDS to all agencies; the fallacy of that claim has been pointed out time and again in official UN and agency reports. Some agencies have undertaken studies of the inordinate impact of the pandemic on women in their sectors, but it is rare to find an agency that has developed comprehensive, targeted interventions in response.

With the work of gender mainstreaming delegated to one and all, no one feels accountable. Discussions in the UNAIDS Committee of Cosponsoring Organizations are revealing. Its report to the 18th meeting of the Programme Coordinating Board in 2006 makes reference to the problem (“the epidemic continues to worsen, especially among women and young people”^{viii}), but after that, the word “women” appears four times -- all clustered in a single paragraph describing UNFPA’s work. The word “gender” does not appear at all.

Without an operational agency capable of identifying the gender issues that drive the pandemic in each country *and* of implementing strategies to address them, the proportion of infected adults who are women will continue to rise. HIV/AIDS demonstrates what a women’s agency, through programmatic support, would add at the country level, without danger of duplicating the work of any member of the UN Country Team. Just a few examples of the unmet needs:

- home-based care, including remittances for female caregivers;
- reducing the “opportunity costs” of care, including loss of education, skills training, job prospects, and opportunities to participate in public life;
- widows’ inheritance and property rights;
- income alternatives to transactional, intergenerational, “survival sex”;
- realistic alternatives to “ABC” (abstain, be faithful, use a condom) for married women;
- child-bearing options for HIV-positive women;
- infant feeding research, education, communication and support;
- AIDS education for grandmothers, who provide the bulk of orphan care;
- child care and elder care for working women in AIDS-affected households;
- nutritional support;
- skills training and income generation for HIV-positive women;

- access to credit;
- legal aid, including preparation of wills;
- addressing AIDS-related stigma, discrimination and domestic abuse;
- addressing police brutality and wrongful imprisonment;
- assisting with safe disclosure of HIV test results to husbands and families;
- counseling, legal aid, prevention programmes and legislative reform on domestic abuse, sexual assault and rape including marital rape;
- protecting against harassment and sexual abuse in formal and informal workplaces; and
- addressing a range of harmful cultural and traditional practices from widow inheritance, to ritual ‘cleansing’ and polygamy, to newly emerging discriminatory practices including virgin testing.

4. THE DYSFUNCTIONAL “WOMEN’S MACHINERY”

Stinging words and phrases are uttered again and again by UN bashers: “irrelevant”, “talk shop”, “ineffective”, “lip service”... On the other hand, it’s not hard for champions of the UN to counter with an impressive picture of an institution that has not only been remarkably effective on many fronts, but that is in many ways indispensable. However, where gender equality and women’s rights are concerned, even the strongest UN apologists have no defense.

The 1945 Charter pledged to “employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples.” Not half, but *all peoples*.

Over six decades later, over half of the global population is still conspicuously under-represented in history books, board rooms, science labs, trade negotiations, art museums, the General Assembly and G8 summits.

The principle of gender equality and the promise to achieve it have been restated endlessly since 1945 – so often, in fact, that the words have grown as soft and supple as a favorite lullaby. Speechwriters and document drafters now recite its verses by rote: first the numbing statistics, then the gasp of alarm, the roster of noble objectives, and finally, the sing-along chorus of solemn commitments.

Thought doesn’t seem to be a requirement any more: the vow to uphold women’s human rights comes in convenient pre-fabricated paragraphs, ideologically framed and ready to insert into any speech or press statement, international

document or declaration, charter, convention, resolution or plan of action. The trouble is, we've pledged our allegiance to gender equality and women's empowerment so often that the words -- floating on air, unconnected to any actions -- have lost all meaning. The Member States of the United Nations are of one mind – that is, until they're asked to allocate human and financial resources to achieve those goals. To this day, promoting the advancement of women and addressing their needs and rights is relegated to a small handful of under-funded, under-staffed, barely known divisions.

| ENTITY | ANNUAL BUDGET (2004) | CORE STAFF | OPERATIONAL CAPACITY |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|--|
| United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) | 51 million | 47 ^x | 15 regional and sub-regional offices 0 country offices UNIFEM's resources are to be used mainly "as a catalyst" and "to support innovative and experimental activities benefiting women". Its "ability to provide technical support and expertise to programme countries is limited by virtue of its resources and modest field network." ^x |
| Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) | 13 million | 45 | 0 regional offices 0 country offices |
| Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues (OSAGI) | | | 0 regional offices 0 country offices |
| Institute for Research and Training for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) | <1 million | 9 | 0 regional offices 0 country offices |
| TOTAL | 65 million | 101 | Negligible |

5. THE SUB-MACHINERY: NETWORK, COMMISSION, COMMITTEE, RESOLUTION

Where women's empowerment and gender equality are concerned, the most important norms and standards were set out in:

- 1) the plans of action that governments agreed to follow at four world conferences in the 1990's, (generally known by the names of the cities in which they were held):
 - the World Conference on Human Rights in *Vienna*
 - the International Conference on Population and Development in *Cairo*
 - the World Summit for Social Development in *Copenhagen*, and
 - the Fourth World Conference on Women in *Beijing*, and
 -
- 2) the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, known as CEDAW, and
- 3) Security Council Resolution 1325.

Of those, the most comprehensive are the **Beijing** Platform for Action, which sets out a sweeping agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment with 12 areas of critical concern; and **CEDAW**, which is effectively a women's bill of rights that can be amended to retain its relevance as new issues emerge. Security Council Resolution 1325 recognizes women's special vulnerability during conflicts, and calls for women's 'equal participation and full involvement' in resolving conflicts and maintaining peace.

In addition to the staffed entities listed in the preceding table, three other mechanisms contribute to the women's machinery. One is internal: the InterAgency Network on Gender and Women's Equality (IANGWE) convenes "gender focal points" and other relevant staff of UN entities in New York to share information and resources, and to address system-wide issues of concern. The others are inter-governmental: representatives to the CEDAW Committee (which oversees the convention's implementation by the governments that have ratified it) and the Commission on the Status of Women, or CSW (established in 1946 by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to promote the principle that men and women are entitled to equal rights) meet just a few times yearly. Representatives are nominated by their governments.

Each mechanism now functions separately, with no single entity to bring coherence to their efforts.

| MECHANISM | APPOINTEES / MEMBERS | MANDATES / TERMS of REFERENCE | OPERATIONAL CAPACITY |
|---|---|--|-----------------------------|
| Commission on the Status of Women | Nominees put forward by 45 Member States elected by ECOSOC | meet annually for 2 weeks to: - form policy on gender equality and the advancement of women - and ensure effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Summit Outcome Document. | none |
| CEDAW Committee | 23 experts nominated and elected by States parties to the Convention | - monitor States parties' implementation of CEDAW - receive complaints by women or on behalf of groups of women, and - launch inquiries into grave and systematic violations of women's human rights. | none |
| InterAgency Network on Gender & Women's Equality | 60 focal points from 25 UN entities that meet in New York | - promote gender equality throughout the UN - monitor and coordinate mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the programmatic, normative and operational work of the UN | none |
| UN Security Council Resolution 1325 | All UN Member States are obliged to follow Security Council resolutions | Calls on governments, the Security Council, the Secretary-General, parties to conflict and others to ensure: -- an end to impunity for gender-based crimes during and after conflicts ; -- a gender perspective in all peace-making and peacekeeping processes; and -- full, equal involvement of women in decisions about preventing and resolving conflict. | none |

According to the *Organizational Assessment of UNIFEM* quoted earlier:

“In contrast to UNFPA or UNICEF, which have clear and recognized leadership roles within the major intergovernmental and normative processes related to their work (e.g., UNFPA and [the International Conference on Population and Development] ICPD or UNICEF and the [Convention on the Rights of the Child] CRC), UNIFEM has no ‘official’ responsibilities related to the Beijing process, the Commission on the Status of Women or CEDAW. This is confusing for Member States, United Nations and civil society partners and donors, which expect UNIFEM to have unique influence in these processes.”^{xi}

Nor does UNIFEM have official responsibilities in relation to Security Council Resolution 1325.

6. BARGAIN-BASEMENT MACHINERY AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL

In lieu of recruiting expert staff to address the complex, persistent and so far intractable problems caused by gender discrimination in every country, there are approximately 1300 ‘gender focal points’ overall. Most do not apply for that job, but are assigned it along with their regular duties. Roughly 1000 are junior and entry-level staff; they have no background or experience in gender or women’s issues, and no authority in their offices. Like the fire marshals who volunteer to usher colleagues from office buildings in emergencies (though with less-clear guidance about how to carry out their functions), gender focal points have no particular qualifications for their extra-curricular assignments, and are required to devote little time to them. In general, they are selected because they are women. (This would be a direct violation of the UN’s equal employment opportunity regulations, except that – like so much ‘women’s work’-- the job of gender focal point is almost always tacked on to an employee’s full-time work.)

At the country level, UN Country Teams are encouraged to coordinate the efforts of agencies and staff who deal with gender and women’s programmes. In theory, this is accomplished through “Gender Theme Groups” that meet on a regular basis. In reality, Gender Theme Groups function in a minority of countries, attendance is not mandatory and membership is often made up of the same junior staff who act as Gender Focal Points. The capacity of a Gender Theme Group or its members to map what exists, assess what’s needed and insist on its integration into the work of various agencies ranges from limited to non-existent.

| MECHANISM | APPOINTEES / MEMBERS | MANDATES / TERMS of REFERENCE | OPERATIONAL CAPACITY |
|----------------------------|--|--|---|
| Gender Focal Points | 1300 | “The role of gender focal points should be understood as that of a facilitator, catalyst and advisor, and not as the accountable (<i>sic</i>) for the implementation of gender mainstreaming in their organizations.” ^{xii} | None |
| Gender Theme Groups | 41 (in 134 UN Country Teams surveyed) ^{xiii} | - consolidate and coordinate the work of core agencies; - devise and implement integrated strategies - manage joint programming in support of results at the country level. ^{xiv} | varies by country (very limited in most countries) |

7. GENDER MAINSTREAMING: AN EXCUSE TO DO NOTHING

Knowing that the machinery described above is inadequate for achieving the extensive, complex goals of gender equality and women’s empowerment, the UN response has been to spread responsibility for that work across the system. The result has been the creation of an institutional culture that treats gender and women’s rights as ‘soft’ issues, requiring no particular expertise.

Gender mainstreaming – or the effort to secure the rights of women, and achieve equality between men and women, by ensuring that a gender perspective and gender analysis are integrated into all policies, projects and institutions – is a good concept in principle. But in practice – employed instead of, rather than along with, targeted programmes for women – it has failed to transform an unjust world into one in which men and women share power equally. Gender mainstreaming is a euphemism for rendering women invisible.

At the UN General Assembly’s 59th session, Member States called on all organizations in the UN system, once again, to... “mainstream gender and to pursue gender equality in their country programmes, planning instruments and sector-wide programmes and to articulate specific country-level goals and targets in this field in accordance with the national development strategies .”^{xv}

Faced with a job that requires a fork lift, women have been handed a fork. Expert assessments and analyses demonstrate that as a strategy for transforming societies into places fit for women and men, gender mainstreaming – misunderstood, poorly applied -- has proven itself entirely inadequate to the job.

No evaluation that we could find of the gender mainstreaming carried out since 1995 rated it as a successful strategy for achieving women's empowerment or gender equality. Results of assessments commissioned by donors, UN departments, funds and programmes themselves, the World Bank and women's NGOs are consistent: gender mainstreaming has not served its intended purpose, and has, by many expert analyses, actually proven counter-productive.

| IS GENDER MAINSTREAMING WORKING? Sample UN and donor assessments | | |
|---|--|--|
| Evaluation of: | By: | Findings: |
| UN system, April 2006 | IANGWE ^{xvi} | "The Network...noted that at all levels of the system, there was still limited awareness and understanding of gender equality and gender mainstreaming..." |
| UNICEF, UNDP, WFP ILO & UNFPA, April 2006 | Task Force chaired by UNIFEM and UNFPA ^{xvii} | "Gender equality and the empowerment of women are currently poorly covered in agency evaluations." |
| UNDG (25 UN agencies involved in development) June 2006 | UNDG Task Team on Gender Equality ^{xviii} | "Implementation and accountability are lagging behind policy, interfering with achieving concrete progress on the ground." (Recommendation: "Time to move from policy to action and accountability.") |
| UK development assistance, 1995-2004 | Department for International Development (DfID) ^{xix} | "Available evidence from other evaluations suggests the benefits of gender mainstreaming and impacts on gender equality are at best embryonic, and at worst still to become visible." |
| Swedish development assistance, 2004 | Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs ^{xx} | "Overall, experiences with gender mainstreaming suggest the following problems: a) The concept itself is unclear and misunderstood; b) Mainstreaming has been reduced to a technique; c) Mainstreaming is a pretext for saving overall resources; d) Gender mainstreaming has not been transformative." |

These analyses and examples comprise but one slim file in an extensive library of research and analysis – commissioned by various parts of the UN itself, funded by donors, sometimes but not often tabled before Member States – and while they are devoured and critiqued and quoted by women’s groups and gender specialists, they seem never, ever to cross the desks of the high-level decision-makers who, in a parallel universe nearly devoid of women and their perspectives, determine the fate of the world.

8. THE FAÇADE OF ‘FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS’

As the UN Secretary-General has stressed time and again:

“...study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, or to reduce infant and maternal mortality. No other policy is as sure to improve nutrition and promote health -- including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation. And I would also venture that no policy is more important in preventing conflict, or in achieving reconciliation after a conflict has ended.”^{xxi}

Naturally, the world expects the United Nations not only to state the case, but to lead the charge. That’s understandable; the Secretary-General has often said:

*“we need a deep social revolution that will give more power to women, and transform relations between women and men at all levels of society.... **For my part, I promise you the full support of the United Nations family.**”^{xxii}*

The words are easily found, but the will is harder to capture. Asked on May 3rd by a coalition of NGO networks for his advice and opinion about reform proposals that could strengthen the women’s machinery of the UN, the Secretary-General, “promised consideration but extended a caution. ‘It would be difficult to advocate for the creation of a new independent women’s agency at this time,’ he warned, ‘in part because of expected government resistance.’”^{xxiii}

Government resistance – at least on the visible surface – is voiced as a reluctance to spend. But such narrowly targeted thrift raises suspicions. Most people would agree that reforming the UN to achieve efficiency is a simple bureaucratic exercise compared with the multi-layered complexities of reforming the world to achieve gender equality. Yet, against the backdrop of the \$65 million allocated for the UN women’s machinery, and amid cautions about asking for more, the UN requested \$74 million just to fund the current round of UN reform activities.^{xxiv} It remains to be seen whether any of those activities will reform the UN for the benefit of women.

With no sign of a commitment to funding from within, apparently it’s expected that any ‘deep social revolution’ to transform gender relations at all levels will come

from outside the UN, perhaps to be imposed upon it. But life outside, on the margins of power, is enervating, and many women's groups and units that struggle valiantly have seen support for women's empowerment spike upwards in the 1990s, and diminish in the years since. They are losing hope and energy along with resources.

A new study by AWID, the Association for Women's Rights in Development, finds that thanks in large part to gender mainstreaming, official development assistance and donor funding has grown harder for women's rights organizations to obtain. Many large foundations say that gender is "out of fashion"; and many of the major international NGOs that supported women's groups up to and beyond the international conference at Beijing say they have since lost much of their explicit attention to gender equality. AWID researchers conclude that "while public awareness of women's rights violations internationally may have increased, funding for women's organizations to guarantee those rights has not....The majority of women's groups reported to have annual budgets in 2004 well under \$100,000."^{xv} Not quite enough to bankroll a "deep social revolution".

9. STANDING SIDE BY SIDE, BUDGETS TELL THE STORY

As noted above, the total annual budget of all the UN women's entities combined is \$65 million. UNIFEM, the only part of the women's/gender machinery with any operational capacity, had a total budget in 2004 of \$51.1 million, all inclusive – salaries and benefits, consultancies, all programmes and projects, research, information, support to NGOs and women's networks, every activity undertaken, all travel, meetings, office space -- everything. That same year, the International Atomic Energy Commission had \$51.7 million just for "common staff costs" -- that is, expenses over and above salaries, such as pension, insurance, housing allowances, education grants, removal of household effects, sick leave and language training.

Another comparison is even more apt: the UN children's fund had a 2004 budget of over \$2 billion, while the UN women's fund operated with 2 ½ per cent of that.

According to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, global foreign aid increased significantly between 2004 and 2005, to more than \$100 billion annually, and the world is now well on its way to meeting the goal of \$130 billion per year by 2010.

In its first year, an effective, operational women's agency for half the global population would require just one per cent of the current total of foreign aid – that is, \$1 billion. Growth of 10 per cent annually would double the budget by 2015 (the target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals), bringing the agency up to UNICEF's current funding levels.

10. WHERE THE CURRENT FUNDING FOR WOMEN LEAVES US TODAY^{xxvi}

Women make up 70 per cent of the world's poor, 67 per cent of the world's illiterate, and 76 per cent of African youth infected with HIV. They own only one per cent of assets worldwide.

Every minute of every day, a woman dies in childbirth -- a statistic that hasn't improved in the two decades since the totals were first counted.

Every minute, five more girls have their genitals mutilated.

Every minute and a half in the world's wealthiest nation, a woman is raped. In 141 countries, marital rape remains a legal activity.

Only nine per cent of the developing world's HIV-positive pregnant women have access to the simple treatment that can block transmission of HIV to newborns.

Violence against women and girls is increasing: 22 to 33 percent of all women experienced physical and sexual abuse by a male intimate in 2003. Every year 5,000 women become victims of "honor killings" worldwide.

Every minute, 156 underage girls are married. Every minute, 40 teenage girls become pregnant. Every minute, 5 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are infected with HIV, three-quarters of them female.

AIDS is the leading cause of death for all South African women, and for African-American women ages 25 to 34. Twenty-five years after the first cases were diagnosed among male patients, gender inequality has turned AIDS into a women's epidemic the world over.

As of April 2006, women held just 16.6 per cent of the world's parliamentary seats.

Of 192 UN Member States, 3.1 per cent have a woman president and 3.6 per cent have a woman prime minister.

Women ambassadors represent 9.3 per cent of Member States at the UN in New York.

In the global media, women are the subjects of 21 per cent of news stories – up from 17 per cent in 1995; men are 86 per cent of experts asked for opinions, and 83 per cent of spokespersons.

In May 2006, the American weekly "Newsweek" magazine published a concise history of the 25-year-old AIDS pandemic. Of 16 people mentioned by name for their major roles in addressing AIDS, one was a woman.

11. THE MACHINERY WE HAVE vs. THE MACHINERY WE NEED

The Beijing Platform for Action sets out a global women’s agenda, and its “12 critical areas of concern” establish priorities. Eleven years after Beijing, the UN’s women’s machinery must be reformed to execute the conference’s simple plan. Even if funds were injected into the UN’s existing structure, and even if the little gender mainstreaming that is occurring in UN Country Teams were closely coordinated, there would still be huge segments of the female population, and huge parts of women’s lives, that would go unaddressed. With the exception of access to sexual and reproductive health services, which is provided (though, for lack of funds and staff, not sufficiently) by UNFPA, and the girl-child, a population well covered by UNICEF up to older adolescent years, most of the specific actions spelled out in painstaking detail in the Beijing Platform for Action have no home in any UN agency.

WHAT EXISTS?

| | |
|---|--|
| <p><i>At the global policy level:</i></p> | <p>CEDAW, monitored by the CEDAW Committee, which is given technical support by DAW</p> <p>Beijing Platform for Action, monitored by the Commission on the Status of Women, which is also serviced by DAW</p> <p>.....</p> |
| <p><i>At the global and regional advocacy, support and research level:</i></p> | <p>OSAGI and DAW, with responsibility for advancing women in and beyond the UN</p> <p>UNIFEM, with 15 regional and sub-regional offices and funding (in 2004) of \$51 million</p> <p>INSTRAW, with a staff of nine and a budget under \$1 million</p> <p>.....</p> |
| <p><i>At the country programme level:</i></p> | <p>Gender Theme Groups established in a small number of UN Country Programmes to coordinate the various gender mainstreaming activities of the UN agencies.</p> <p>Gender Focal Points who, along with their regular duties – usually junior-level -- represent their agencies at inter-agency meetings in countries where Gender Theme Groups have been established, and promote the mainstreaming of gender.</p> |

AND WHAT'S MISSING?

AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL:

- A full-fledged operational fund/programme with unambiguous authority, and senior leadership, with the status of other major UN entities
- An entity with official ties to CEDAW, the Beijing process and CSW
- An entity with policy-making capacity
- An entity with capacity for global and national information and data collection
- An entity with enough professional gender expertise to provide technical support for gender and women-specific analysis and planning at all levels
- An entity with experience in human resource- and capacity-building for women
- An entity with formal partnerships with women's organizations and networks
- An entity with professional capacity in advocacy, mobilization, communications and media
- An entity with expertise in information technology and electronic networking
- An entity with strong programme funding and private sector fundraising capacity
- An entity that supports *all* global monitoring and reporting, with official ties to the entities that service the CEDAW Committee and the CSW)
- An entity capable of providing experienced, professional-level technical support to gender mainstreaming across the UN and in governments
- And an entity with the capacity to regularly monitor and evaluate gender mainstreaming across the UN and in governments



AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL:

- Direct support to women's organizations and their programmes on gender
- Technical support to governments
- Operational capacity
- **Targeted programmes in Beijing's "12 critical areas of concern":**
 - women and poverty;**
 - women and education and training;**
 - women and health;**
 - violence against women;**
 - women and armed conflict;**
 - women and the economy;**
 - women in power and decision-making;**
 - institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women;**
 - women's human rights;**
 - women and the media;**
 - women and the environment; and**
 - the girl-child.**
- Affirmative action in support of marginalized, under-represented and under-served groups, including youth, the elderly, indigenous women, women escaping tyranny and harmful cultural and traditional practices, and women living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

As the boxes on the previous pages demonstrate, it would not be difficult or complicated to reform the UN in a way that would immediately begin to empower women and achieve gender equality:

The **mission** is stated in the UN Charter.

The legal basis for the **mandate** is established in CEDAW.

The **guiding principles** were set out at global conferences and their reviews.

The main **purpose and activities** are outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action.

The technical **expertise** can be found in thousands of civil society organizations.

The **governance** structures to use as models, with appropriate adaptation, exist within the UN.

All that stands between commitment and results is *the political will to create a new women's agency.*

12. AN OVERVIEW OF PROPOSALS ON UN REFORM^{xxvii}

Early in 2006, three “think pieces” produced by European Member States were circulated that emphasize the need to reduce the number and the functions of the UN’s entities:

- The Netherlands proposed to reorganize the UN into three strong operational agencies dedicated to development, humanitarian affairs and the environment, with in addition a few “global centers of excellence” or think tanks on issues such as health, energy and agriculture.
- Belgium suggested one single “UN Development Agency” to consolidate the mandates of the funds and programmes, including humanitarian agencies (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, UNAIDS, OCHA, HCR, UNRWA...). In addition to this central agency, the Belgian government endorsed the creation of a new specialized agency on Environment and Sustainable Development, and a stronger FAO to oversee IFAD and WFP.
- The United Kingdom’s “non-paper” proposed the establishment of a Central Millennium Development Fund at headquarters level, in which existing funds and programmes would be merged.

All European proposals included a unified country-level UN operated under the “three ones” principle: one UN team, one coordinator, one UN programme.

In a letter to the Coherence Panel, the G13 did not outline structural and organizational changes, but outlined the main principles required to “shape and underpin a new vision for the future”:

- orientation towards supporting sustainable development and the achievement of the agreed international development goals, including the MDGs;
- policy and institutional coherence;
- more unified presence than today at country level with one UN country team, one country representative for the whole system and one integrated, results based plan;
- support to national priorities and processes as well as efficient and timely delivery;
- clear division of labor and effective partnerships, based on comparative advantages among the UN system, Global Funds, bilateral actors and the IFIs [international financial institutions].

The G77 + China letter to the Panel differed notably from all proposals made by donors. While recognizing that reform is necessary to strengthen the role of the UN, the G77 + China took a cautious approach to mandate review: *“The G77 and China believes that the exercise of system-wide coherence should not erode the mandate, resources and activities of organizations and units that play an important role in development. In particular, the mandates and roles of organizations that were created by the General Assembly or ECOSOC should not be eliminated, removed or otherwise eroded.”*

13. PROPOSALS FOR REFORM OF THE WOMEN’S MACHINERY

The government positions committed to paper so far have given little space to gender or the advancement and empowerment of women. Discussions since have engaged women’s and civil society organizations and others, and center around five basic proposals for addressing those issues:

Proposal 1. The UN Special Envoy for AIDS in Africa, addressing the Coherence Panel on July 2nd, summed up the position elaborated in this paper by describing the need for:

“a full-fledged agency with real operational capacity on the ground to build partnerships with governments, to engage in public policy, to design and finance programmatic interventions for women, to give NGOs and community-based women’s groups the support their voices and ideas have never had, to extract money from bilateral donors, to whip the UN family into shape, to bring substance and know-how to the business of gender mainstreaming, to involve women in every facet of life from development to trade to culture to peace and security, to lobby vociferously and indefatigably for every aspect of gender equality, to have sufficient staff and resources to make everyone sit up and take notice.”^{xxviii}

A consortium of international women's organizations also addressed the Coherence Panel in July. Its main proposal was echoed by each of the civil society organizations that followed with their own presentations:

"We believe that the current system is no longer acceptable. Therefore, we have focused on the approaches that have the greatest potential to bring about coherence and positive systemic change. Our preferred approach would be the creation of a well-resourced independent entity with normative, operational and oversight capacity, a universal country presence and led by an Under-Secretary General."^{xxix}

Failing that, the consortium added a second-best option:

Proposal 2. "An alternative approach would be the creation of a specialized coordinating body with similar functions, drawing on the UNAIDS model."^{xxx}

Proposal 3. The Special Envoy for AIDS in Asia and the Pacific outlined her views as part of a Roundtable Dialogue in Geneva on June 23-24:

"My idea would be to merge all the existing mechanisms – OSAGI, DAW, INSTRAW, UNIFEM – and establish a Centre for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, with an Executive Director at the Under-Secretary level reporting directly to the Secretary-General."^{xxxi}

Proposal 4. Of several options under scrutiny by the Coherence Panel, one involves the creation of a UNAIDS-type secretariat: the existing women's machinery would be amalgamated into a secretariat to coordinate the work carried out by various agencies, and officers would be posted in countries to coordinate the gender and women's advocacy and programmes carried out by UN Country Teams.

Proposal 5. Another option rests on the outcome of proposals to significantly strengthen the role of Resident Coordinators at country level. If RCs are vested with greater authority to lead as well as manage the entire UN Country Team, this option would ask the Resident Coordinator to assume overall responsibility for all gender and women's empowerment work, possibly through a gender advisor in the RC's office.

These proposals warrant closer examination.

As is obvious by now, this paper defends the need for a full-fledged operational agency outlined in Proposal 1. Our information leads us to conclude that Proposals 2, 3, 4 and 5 are not viable, and would be counter-productive to pursue – primarily because they omit the single most important component: operational capacity at country level.

-- The "UNAIDS model" referred to in Proposal 2 and again in Proposal 4 consists of a Geneva-based secretariat, smaller InterCountry Teams in strategic regions, and UNAIDS Country Coordinators, or UCCs – some with an office of one or two additional junior and support staff -- at the country level. The UNAIDS experience shows that it is difficult to coordinate the work of large, autonomous UN agencies, because they are not accountable to the coordinating body. (Recognizing this problem, the Secretary-General promoted the Executive Director of UNAIDS from ASG to USG in hopes that a rank equal to that of the heads of the UNAIDS co-sponsoring agencies would provide added authority.) The difficulties of coordinating UN agencies at the global level is compounded at the country level for UCCs, whose small satellite offices rarely succeed in aligning the work of agencies, most of which have considerably more seniority, authority, staff and resources. And the problem would be magnified many times over for a gender advisor attached to a coordinating body. Given the dearth of substantive work now being done by the UN on gender and women's empowerment, there is no question that 'reforming' the women's machinery by placing a secretariat at the headquarters level to support a network of country-level advisors – each with inadequate staff, no authority and no significant resources – is a plan that's destined to fail. Added to the problem of limited authority and clout is an additional built-in disadvantage: in many countries, there is simply no significant programming on gender or women's empowerment to coordinate.

-- The amalgamation of UNIFEM, DAW, OSAGI and INSTRAW suggested in Proposal 3 is not a change for the better, but simply a variation on the small, under-funded, limited machinery that exists. It might bring greater coordination to the current bodies, but there would still be no operational capacity to translate policies into action on the ground. The additional suggestion that the answer lies in promoting the senior-most official in the women's machinery from an Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) to an Under Secretary-General (USG) rides on the counterfeit assumption that authority and influence correlate with levels of seniority rather than with the wherewithal and ability to deliver and to lead. To be effective, a USG overseeing women's issues would also need to have executive power over a women's agency with the full capacity and resources to perform.

-- Proposal 5, which suggests that Resident Coordinators take responsibility for gender equality and women's empowerment at country level, is the most deeply flawed; it ignores both the history and the current reality of the Resident Coordinator system. Countless experiments have attempted to breathe life into a system plagued by lack of relevance, and characterized in many countries by incoherence. Never has the Resident Coordinator system demonstrated any background, interest, skill or capacity in the area of gender or women; individual RCs are not chosen for their knowledge or experience in implementing the gender norms and standards to which Member States have agreed, and few if any have revealed that potential.

On paper, though, Resident Coordinators have been responsible for gender mainstreaming all along. According to a UNDP document published in November 2002, “UNDP’s stewardship of the resident co-ordinator system gives the organization the responsibility to promote gender mainstreaming systemically – not only through its own programmes but also through the work of the UN Country Team.”^{xxxii} A separate UNDP publication, *Gender Mainstreaming in Practice: A Handbook*, at first confirms the critical importance of gender mainstreaming to all development work and the sophisticated level of expertise required – then offers tips for dispensing with the troublesome obligation as efficiently as possible. (A reminder of the Secretary-General’s words seems in order at this point: *we need a deep social revolution that will give more power to women, and transform relations between women and men at all levels of society...*). Towards the beginning of the gender mainstreaming handbook, in the section on integrating gender into the policy-making process, this casual reassurance is presented in an eye-catching box:

Is Gender Mainstreaming Really So Complicated?

You should not feel overwhelmed by the task of gender mainstreaming. While it is true that in-depth gender-based analysis requires a sophisticated level of expertise, this, when required, can be outsourced to experts.

For the most part, practical gender mainstreaming is about running through a checklist of questions to ensure you have not overlooked anything. It is about asking the right questions so that you can see where limited resources should best be diverted. Gender mainstreaming is a necessary process for achieving gender equality in the most effective and efficient manner.^{xxxiii}

Deep social revolutions cannot be outsourced. Checklists don’t transform societies.

The belief that a single gender advisor, reporting to the RC in each country, could provide enough technical guidance to provoke a renaissance for women in every UN Country Team and in every government is not a solution, but a manufactured contrivance. The experiment is designed to fail, crafted whole out of a need to appear to be addressing women’s issues -- without committing any real funds or energy, and without upsetting the status quo.

Placing all hope for women in a strengthened Resident Coordinator system is also flawed from the institutional and the government-led programme perspectives. It gives one person excessive power and control, and assumes that in every case, that one person will be first-rate. The proposal is premised on the fallacy that willingness is the only qualification required to address a complex, multi-layered social problem that has so far eluded all the experts. The proposal casts gender equality and women’s empowerment in the demeaning light that the

UN has shed on the goals for decades: ‘women’s work’ can be dispensed with by anyone who has the energy to take on this irksome but politically necessary task.

14. FACING THE (UNDERSTANDABLE) SKEPTICISM HEAD-ON

A recurring question raised in response to the call for a full-fledged women’s agency is not flattering to the UN. Many outside observers ask: Given the slow-moving bureaucracy, the hierarchical nature, the ineffectiveness, the patronage, the patriarchy, and the lack of coordination that some believe characterize parts of the UN, what guarantee do we have that a UN women’s agency will be any different?

Over and over again at its July 2nd consultation with civil society representatives from around the world, the High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence heard calls for a full-fledged, autonomous, fully funded, well staffed UN women’s entity with the operational capacity in countries to turn policy into practice. But all agreed that it would, indeed, have to be a different kind of agency, and gender advocates have ideas about how to make it so.

The panel heard the explanation that, pushed to the margins of every system, most women haven’t benefited from the mainstream’s entitlements, but neither have they been shackled by its constraints. Left to fend for themselves, women have designed their own ways of organizing and making decisions, of mobilizing, choosing leaders and reaching consensus, of dividing the work and apportioning its benefits. They have formed connections from the village to the global levels, and created vast networks of experts and advocates that provide a ready-made foundation on which to build an international women’s agency.

Innovative designs in five areas in particular could help guarantee not only that the women’s entity stands out among international bodies, but that its existence has a positive influence on the entire UN system, demonstrating by example the strength of active listening, cooperation and networking. The women’s agency can be qualitatively different if it is built on the foundation of the worldwide women’s movement, and taps the expertise that already exists – in women’s non-governmental organizations, among activists and academics, professional associations and, uniquely, in grassroots community-based groups.

1. Different, pro-women governance structures

To ensure gender balance and a prominent role for women’s civil society organizations in the governing body of a new women’s entity, the UN would have to look beyond its usual models.

Most governing bodies that oversee UN entities comprise Member States, selected with careful attention to geographic distribution, but no concern for gender balance. Because over 90 per cent of governments send men to the UN to represent them, by default all governing bodies are overwhelmingly male. The typical governance structure would therefore automatically mean that, at least for the foreseeable future, the vast majority of executives overseeing the new women's entity would be male. (Women sometimes fill the various Board seats assigned to their governments, but most often this merely signals that the Ambassador had duties he considered more pressing, and delegated the Board task to a lower-ranking mission official – one who must speak for him, and report to him.)

Alternative structures that give governing power to civil society do exist. The International Labour Organization has a unique tri-partite Governing Body (charged with making policy, establishing the budget and electing the Director-General) made up of government (one half), employers (one quarter) and workers (one quarter).

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, though not a part of the UN, provides an interesting prototype. Its Board is made up of 19 voting and 4 non-voting members representing donor and developing country governments, NGOs, “communities affected by the diseases”, the private sector and private foundations. Also included in the Global Fund's formal governance structure is a “Biennial Partnership Forum” of some 450 “stakeholder constituencies” that convene regularly to review the Fund's progress and advise on improvements.

2. Different, pro-women affiliations with civil society

Leaders in the global women's movement express the legitimate concern that a powerful UN women's entity 1) might be seen as a replacement for women's organizations; 2) might further marginalize and deplete the resources of civil society organizations, thereby removing the system of non-governmental checks and balances that now critiques, prods and complements government-led initiatives and holds national and multilateral decision-makers accountable; and 3) might vest inappropriate control over women's issues in government appointees and international civil servants with little or no expertise in designing targeted interventions or in mainstreaming gender.

Among the possible solutions that could prevent such negative outcomes:

- a governance structure can be designed by legislation, as described above, that gives civil society a formal voice in policy and budget;
- a fixed percentage of the entity's resources can be allocated to support the ongoing work of women's civil society organizations in all sectors and geographic regions;

- during a pre-determined start-up period, women's organizations can be compensated financially for loaning or "seconding" expert, experienced staff to fill management and other positions in the women's entity.

3. Different, pro-women relationships with other UN agencies

Equally legitimate is the concern that with a strong women's agency in place, other UN agencies would feel free to abandon their work on women and gender. Again, the women's agency can be designed not only to prevent such a negative outcome, but to enhance, support and increase the women-specific and gender mainstreaming work of all other UN entities – a practice that will improve the coherence of the entire UN system and significantly lift the capacity of each individual agency to fulfill its mandate.

UNICEF provides a good example of complementary mandates: the children's fund advocates the inclusion of child-friendly policies and programmes in the work of all UN entities, encouraging them to raise children's concerns to the forefront, and assisting them to incorporate the special needs of children in their programmes. To cite just a very few examples, UNICEF works in close collaboration with (not in place of): the World Health Organization on child immunization, prevention of malaria, infant feeding and paediatric AIDS treatment; the ILO on child labour and child trafficking; the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on addressing violations of children's rights; the World Food Programme on school feeding and emergency food rations; the High Commissioner for Refugees on the special needs of unaccompanied and undocumented child refugees.

4. Different, pro-women assurances of funding

Guaranteed funding is essential not only to programme sustainability, but to the quality of programmes as well: it's harder to attract the top experts in any discipline if job security is constantly in question, and it's difficult to maintain staff morale when concerns about the immediate future are forever looming. The best of all solutions would be a combination of financial resources that guarantees sustained funding. One possible arrangement that Member States may consider is the combination of allocating "assessed contributions", or UN dues, to cover staff salaries and staff-related costs, and raising "extra-budgetary" or "voluntary" contributions from bilateral donors and the private sector to fund programmes.

5. Different, pro-women relationships with Treaty Bodies and Commissions

Another entirely legitimate concern relates to the CEDAW Committee and the Commission on the Status of Women. Alone among treaty bodies, the CEDAW Committee is not serviced by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva, but by the Division for the Advancement for Women

in New York. In part, this stems from the fact that whereas, for example, Member States were able to give UNICEF the official role of follow-up to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they could find no full-fledged women's entity within the UN system with the mandate or the wherewithal to take on official responsibility for follow-up to CEDAW. The full equation -- a convention, its treaty body and an agency to take the lead on all advocacy and implementation related to the convention -- was missing that last critical component. A similar history applies to the Beijing Platform for Action: Member States could find no UN agency to which they could assign official responsibility in relation to Beijing, as UNFPA had been given an official role in relation to Cairo,

With the normative work done, maintaining the strength of the norms and standards has always been challenging without a strong institutional agency to champion CEDAW and Beijing, and to share the tasks of implementation and monitoring with governments and civil society. The solution lies in the combination of a full-fledged women's agency and the newly reformed Human Rights Council. A women's agency strong enough to shoulder an official relationship to CEDAW and official responsibility for implementing and monitoring the Beijing Platform for Action could work hand in hand with the newly reformed Human Rights Council and the newly enhanced OHCHR. With those two structures in place, an official understanding can be constructed to guarantee that servicing of the CEDAW Committee and the CSW by the OHCHR will strengthen, rather than marginalize, the women's treaty body and commission.

15. WHICH UN AGENCY PROVIDES THE CLOSEST MODEL?

No single entity offers the perfect analogy, but the work of adapting existing models is not foreign to Member States. UNICEF has the size, the authority, the seniority, the country-level operational strength, the human resources, the funding, the cooperative agreements with developing country governments, and the relationships with bilateral donors that are needed in a women's agency, and of course, it also deals with a huge though specifically identifiable subset of the human population. But there's one fundamental difference: while children's capacities to advocate on their own behalf, make decisions and live up to their potential are still evolving, women's are evolved but suppressed. Women are both willing and able to function as full-fledged citizens, with all the human rights and civil, political, social and economic rights and opportunities that constitute independence, but they are denied freedom -- and simultaneously over-burdened with responsibility.

Since a women's agency would not narrow itself to economic and social issues -- because *all* issues are women's issues, for women in *all* countries -- it seems most logical that the new agency's executive board would report to the full General Assembly rather than to ECOSOC, which comprises 54 Member States who are elected to deal with development issues for 3-year terms.

16. SOMETHING TO WORK WITH: A DRAFT PROPOSAL

THE GOALS:

Gender equality
Empowerment of women
Transformation of societies through gender mainstreaming

THE ACTIVITIES:

Promotion of CEDAW
Operational support in countries for the Beijing Platform for Action and its
“12 critical areas of concern” and Security Council Resolution 1325
Implementation of relevant recommendations from other global conferences
Advocacy
Gender mainstreaming support to UN agencies and governments

THE STRUCTURE:

Fund or programme with:

A governance arrangement that gives a formal role to civil society
An executive board reporting to the General Assembly
Field offices in countries with UN Country Teams
Regional offices in Geneva, CEE/CIS, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the
Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean
Headquarters in New York
Liaison with CEDAW Treaty Body in Geneva
Committee for select joint planning and coordination with UNFPA, UNICEF

THE STAFFING:

Country offices led by Representatives on a level equivalent with that of other
agency heads-of-office
Regional staffing
Headquarters led by an Under Secretary-General
Core and other staffing required to fulfill the mandate, and equaling in force to
staffing of the agency with the most comparable mandate (UNICEF), drawn in
large part – at the outset – from staff seconded from existing women’s
organizations

THE BUDGET:

Initially, approximately \$1 billion (1 per cent of ODA), with projected rapid
growth to \$2 billion

THE FUNDING SOURCES:

A combination of:

Assessed contributions (a portion of UN dues) to cover staffing support
Extra-budgetary (voluntary) contributions to support advocacy and programmes

Foundation, corporate and private voluntary contributions

Trust funds to provide sustained and significant support to civil society organizations

INNOVATIVE ARRANGEMENTS:

-- Given that gender balance is far from being achieved by Member States represented through their mission to the UN, the governing board of the women's agency should comprise governments *as well as* elected representatives of civil society organizations with demonstrated expertise in areas of the mandate.

-- Given the existing networks of women's organizations, professional associations and civil society organizations with a focus on gender and women's empowerment and expertise in relevant areas – many of them already accredited to the General Assembly or Iosco -- qualified professionals from those networks should be seconded to and remunerated by the women's agency to staff and guide the start-up phase. This arrangement would infuse the new agency with knowledge, experience and technical and managerial expertise.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOVERNMENTS AND NATIONAL MACHINERIES;

The women's agency would support governments in strengthening their gender and women's ministries and their national machinery. Because most governments do not have strong and viable Ministries of Gender or Women's Affairs capable of carrying out the gender- and women-rationed commitments they have made, the representatives of the women's agency at country level would establish multi-party working relationships with other UN agency representatives and their government counterparts, and work closely as a team (e.g., WHO, the women's agency and the Ministry of Health; UNFPA, the women's agency and the Ministry of Gender; UNICEF, UNESCO, the women's agency and the Ministry of Education, etc.)

PART TWO

1. WHY ISN'T THE CURRENT WOMEN'S MACHINERY WORKING?

UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

Misperceptions persist about the UN women's fund:

1) It is widely (*and understandably*) assumed that the UN has a full-fledged agency for women, just as it does for children, refugees, etc. The point is often stressed that UNIFEM is 'autonomous', and that although it is associated with UNDP, and although the "D2" rank of its Executive Director is on a level with the directors of UNDP's many departments (and below that of 13 UNDP Assistant Secretaries-General), UNIFEM is not a department of UNDP. While the women's fund has done a valiant job of working around the obstacles posed by its low status, and its staff is right to take pride in what they accomplish with the few resources accorded them, it must be said: UNIFEM's "autonomy" is more theoretical than real. The women's fund is in most ways treated just like one of the many UNDP departments headed by a D2 director.

In fact, as if designed to act as a reminder of women's disempowerment, the founding resolution of UNIFEM made the Administrator of UNDP "accountable for all aspects of the management and operations of the Fund", stating that he "shall be responsible for reporting all the financial transactions of the Fund" and "shall issue annual financial statements". The women's fund has no core funding for a communications section, an information technology section or a fundraising section. It is assumed that UNIFEM's "autonomy" gives it the size, the field presence and the resources to match the responsibilities and opportunities implied by its name, but again, the founding resolution takes "into consideration the moderate size of the Fund and its continued need to draw on the operational capacity of other agencies."^{xxxiv}

2) Many Member States wrongly assume that UNIFEM has official responsibilities related to the Beijing process, the CSW and CEDAW. In fact, no UN agency does.

3) It is widely and wrongly assumed that UNIFEM has country offices; it does not.

4) Many civil society organizations wrongly assume that in lieu of its own field presence, UNIFEM provides significant direct support to women's organizations on the ground. In fact, although it was originally intended to do just that, UNIFEM's limited funds for support to women's organizations are dwindling.

5) Perhaps most confusing of all, the fund “focuses its activities on four strategic areas”, but the little operational capacity it has in those areas is miniscule compared with the demands:

- (1) reducing feminized poverty,
- (2) ending violence against women,
- (3) reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls, and
- (4) achieving gender equality in democratic governance in times of peace as well as war.

Even within these poorly addressed global activities, UNIFEM is a fairly minor player. Non-existent at both the top, where decisions are made, and barely present on the ground, where development work is done, it occupies a middle zone with questionable clout. In the first strategic area, UNIFEM’s efforts at reducing poverty are focused largely on micro-enterprise, very rarely entering the male-dominated zones of macro-economics or trade. By all assessments, women’s voices are almost never heard during the formulation of Poverty Reduction Strategies, the preferred economic instrument of the UNDP.

In the second strategic area, a single contribution last year doubled the income of UNIFEM’s global trust fund on violence against women – to \$2 million in total. Using the Amnesty International statistic that one in three women worldwide has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise sexually abused, the trust fund has a per capita expenditure allowance of two-hundredths of one cent per woman.

Members of the general public are often shocked to learn that, contrary to assumptions, the women’s fund has *no* capacity to design, finance, implement, staff and manage its own programmes on women and AIDS, and it is not among the ten co-sponsoring agencies that collaborate on the UN’s joint response to the pandemic through UNAIDS.

Lastly, although UNIFEM played a role in the October 2000 adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325, on the role of women in peace, it has little or no presence in conflict areas; there are no UNIFEM staff, for example, in Darfur. And in countries on the brink of conflict, even if UNIFEM has an office of one or two staff, the UN procedures followed during emergencies make it highly unlikely that they can continue their work ‘at times of war’. When conflicts or disasters erupt, only full-fledged UN agencies can take part in the decisions made at the discretion of the Humanitarian Coordinator or Designated Security Official about which personnel will be among the limited number who remain at their posts. For practical reasons, first consideration is given to agencies whose work is seen as integral to humanitarian assistance – e.g., the World Food Programme, the High Commission for Refugees, UNICEF – and to agencies with operational capacity in the country. Historically, staff who can conduct basic emergency interventions are generally selected to remain in the country, while staff supporting such activities as women’s involvement in conflict resolution, or prevention of gender-based violence among refugees and displaced populations would almost never

be designated “essential staff”. Another factor taken into consideration is an individual’s employment status; again, UNIFEM is at a disadvantage with very few internationally recruited, “regular” staff – those with job security, and entitlements to full benefits including life insurance, hazard insurance and hazard pay. All in all, UNIFEM staff -- already in very short supply before and after emergencies, and often struggling to get by without such basics as telecommunications and safe, adequate transport -- are even further reduced in number during armed conflicts, when women’s needs are magnified and multiplied.

In each of its strategic areas, UNIFEM’s strategic focus is cut short by lack of resources, country presence and, most crucial of all, full capacity to implement.

Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)

DAW was designed to assist the UN system to advance women’s rights worldwide. Its central position at the Secretariat should enable it to serve as a “resource and contact centre” for all stakeholders working on gender issues, including Member States (especially, but not limited to, the parts of their national machineries working on the advancement of women), other UN agencies, and civil society institutions. DAW is uniquely positioned to gather data and information pertaining to gender issues, provide advisory services on gender mainstreaming, facilitate capacity building seminars and trainings, advocate gender issues at the General Assembly and other organs of the UN. It’s questionable how many of these functions are presently being performed by the Division.

In recent years, DAW has shown little capacity to influence policy formulation, little interaction with the operational aspects of gender equality work, and little cooperation or coordination with other parts of the women’s machinery. Without real capacity in analytical research, the Division has produced a number of reports that have been characterized by some as little more than repackaging of information previously presented elsewhere, or recitations of information taken at face value from government sources.

Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)

The post of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women was established to move the goals agreed upon by governments from policy to action, to guide DAW’s work, and to move the “women, peace and security” agenda. It is also meant to promote the status of women in the UN and the achievement of 50/50 gender balance at all levels, and to encourage collaboration among all agencies on gender-related and women’s issues.

The roles of OSAGI and of DAW are not easy to decipher; it appears that the two offices often work in parallel. Recent figures on the status of women in the Secretariat (37.1 per cent of all staff in the professional and higher categories, a drop at senior levels, and projections that 50-50 gender balance goal for 2000 won't be reached in UNEP until 2027, in the UN Office at Geneva until 2072 and in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations until 2100) demonstrate that much remains to be done. To date, OSAGI has not succeeded in performing what should be its most important functions: providing visible, strong, high-level leadership and advocacy on gender equality and advancement of women on the international scene, and serving as the leader of the UN gender machinery. This will not change simply by reclassifying the position up one level, to Under-Secretary General, or USG. (It *is* essential, however, that a USG head a new *operational* women's agency.)

The role and mandate of the Special Adviser seems more appropriate to a position of Special Representative or Envoy, and it could be argued that the remainder of OSAGI's functions fit into the scope of, and could easily be performed by a section within the new women's agency covering the functions of DAW.

Institute for Research and Training for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)

INSTRAW's mandate is "to serve as a vehicle to promote and undertake policy-oriented research and training programmes at the international level to contribute to the advancement of women worldwide". It's difficult to make the argument that putting this work towards women's advancement into a very small, geographically separate, autonomous research and training institute has had clear benefits for women. It will be essential, however, for a women's agency to have a very substantial capacity for research and training.

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Follow-up to international conferences generally falls to the UN agencies that have the lead in the areas covered. But as explained earlier, when it came to assigning a UN agency to follow-up on the Beijing Platform for Action, there was no natural choice. No UN entity had the capacity to handle such a broad agenda, or the country-level presence to work with governments on implementation. Monitoring of the Beijing Platform for Action fell to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which holds its meetings in New York and is given technical support by the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Division for the Advancement of Women (OSAGI and DAW) in the UN Secretariat.

DAW prepares (or oversees the preparation of) a wide range of materials for the CSW. However, considering the Division's limited capacity for analytical research, the extent to which Member States use those materials in the ongoing formulation and implementation of their domestic policies is unclear.

CEDAW Committee

Again as noted earlier, no 'lead agency' was given the mandate for follow-up to CEDAW. A 'treaty body' called the CEDAW Committee -- independent experts, nominated by different countries and elected to rotating terms -- meets regularly in New York to monitor countries' implementation of the CEDAW Convention, and prepare recommendations called the Concluding Comments. The Committee also formulates General Recommendations -- 24 so far -- which interpret articles of CEDAW in relation to contemporary issues, and keep the Convention relevant.

The CEDAW Committee *could* be very powerful. Since the adoption of an Optional Protocol in 2000, the CEDAW Committee has had the power to receive complaints by women or on behalf of groups of women. Ratifying governments have effectively granted it juridical powers, enabling it to function like a Human Rights court in relation to CEDAW implementation. The CEDAW Committee can also launch an inquiry into grave and systematic violations of women's human rights on its own initiative. But like the CSW, the CEDAW Committee is given technical support by OSAGI and DAW in New York, and its full potential has never been exercised.

A quid pro quo seems in order: *if* a new UN women's agency is created, with sufficient capacity to accept 'official responsibilities' in relation to CEDAW and Beijing, then the CEDAW Committee (with financial support from the new agency) and the CSW could comfortably move to Geneva, to be serviced by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, while maintaining their distinct, prominent roles among treaty bodies and commissions, and working in close collaboration with the women's entity.

Security Council Resolution 1325: women, peace and security

A separate but related concern has to do with Security Council Resolution 1325, a comprehensive set of decisions by the Security Council designed to make women equal partners in peace building, peace keeping and rebuilding societies in the aftermath of conflict. Despite the fact that Security Council resolutions are mandatory (sanctions and other punitive measures can be imposed on Member States that don't comply), there is widespread concern that SCR 1325 is not being implemented. In an article on its success to date, the *UN Journal* reported in June that "there are growing complaints that the political thrust of that historic

resolution still remains unimplemented, and that there is now a need for a fulltime UN special representative to pursue the resolution into reality.^{xxxv}

The suggestion that a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) be appointed is not in conflict with calls for a new women's agency: just as UNICEF and the SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict collaborate on shared goals and complement one another's strengths, an SRSG for 1325, together with a women's agency, would make a strong and useful team, and give the women's agency an important dotted-line connection to the formerly all-male bastion of the Security Council and the peace and security agenda.

InterAgency Network on Gender and Women's Equality

Overly generous descriptions of the UN's women's machinery include the InterAgency Network on Gender and Women's Equality. Among literally hundreds of UN task forces, this one is made up of a group of staff whose departments and agencies or whose individual roles are related to women's issues or women's equality. Its purpose is to share information and exchange views, and its members sometimes strike subcommittees that take on surveys and issue papers. Attendance is not mandatory, and the network is confined to NY headquarters.

Gender Focal Points

Among the studies undertaken by IANGWE was a 2001 survey of the gender focal point system, the most comprehensive assessment to date. Its main findings included:

- All agencies now appear to have gender focal points. However over ninety percent are women. They are drawn overwhelmingly from the junior cadre of staff.... Three quarters are officially designated as gender focal points, but one quarter are not. Half were nominated by their offices, regardless of their level of competency, specialization or professional interest. Only one-fifth were recruited against a formally established position.
- One third of gender focal points function without the benefit of a description of their roles and responsibilities...For the majority, working on gender issues is not expected to be a full time function...
- The majority combine gender focal point functions with as many as five other sectoral responsibilities such as human rights and/or reproductive rights, information and communication, interagency liaison, NGO, youth, HIV/AIDS, refugee/internally displaced persons, education, environment and agriculture.^{xxxvi}

More recently, in the 2004 assessment of UNIFEM mentioned above, the authors pointed to a UN system-study that “found 1,300 individuals with gender equality in their Terms of Reference (of which nearly 1,000 were Gender Focal Points with multiple responsibilities and variable levels of professional experience and status).” It concluded that, “this significant community of expertise within the UN system is under-utilized and under-recognized, by default contributing to more fragmentation.”

Some offices do have fulltime gender focal points recruited for that sole purpose – but still, they lack rank and authority. In June 2006, two vacancy bulletins were posted online by UNDP, simultaneously recruiting candidates for jobs in the Country Office for Afghanistan – arguably one of the most complex and difficult places in the world to deal with gender issues. One posting advertised for a Provincial Elections Officer who would “ensure implementation of elections activities...ensuring that regulations and procedures are fully implemented”. Desirable qualifications included an *advanced university degree in political or social science or related field*. The other posting advertised for a Gender Focal Point Officer who would develop a knowledge based on gender issues, women’s organizations, women’s networks and gender expertise in Afghanistan, coordinate with national and international NGOs and political parties to prepare women to stand in elections, and write and develop scripts for media on gender issues. The desirable qualifications for that post: *high school graduate* with a sound knowledge of Afghan cultural and gender issues.^{xxxvii}

Gender Theme Groups

The UN Development Group has created a number of “coordination mechanisms” to support joint work among UN entities; the Gender Theme Group is one of them. The only document pertaining to the Gender Theme Groups posted on the UNDG website, however, is the January 2005 Resource Guide for Theme Groups, which was produced by the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) through a subcommittee undertaking led by UNIFEM. No mention on the website is made of the nature or scope of the work of individual gender theme groups and no mention is made of any assessment of their work. The 2006 Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in UNDP report briefly discusses the UN Gender Thematic Groups at country level. It emphasizes the “potential” and “great promise” of these groups to strengthen UN Country Team performance on gender equality, and it makes a case for UNDP’s support of and involvement in these groups. It notes, however, that the effectiveness of the Gender Theme Groups largely hinges on individual commitment, and that the groups have ceased to function in a number of countries.^{xxxviii} (Specific countries mentioned were Swaziland – an absolute monarchy with a King who chooses an additional, sometimes under-aged wife each year; South Africa, sometimes referred to informally as the “rape capital of the world” because of its horrendous

rates of sexual violence; and Rwanda, which still struggles to rebuild human spirits after a genocide that employed rape as a weapon of war.)

2. STRONGER APART

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

Because sexual and reproductive health and rights focus largely on women, and gender is a fundamental factor, the UN Population Fund is frequently tagged on as part of the UN's "women's machinery". This stand-alone agency has a distinct mandate (which applies to both women *and* men) and does not appear to overlap with others'. Because of its relative size compared with the tiny remainder of the women's machinery (a budget of over half a billion last year, and representatives and small staffs in many country offices), UNFPA's informal inclusion in discussions of the "gender architecture" tends to lend inappropriate weight to women's sexual and reproductive roles and lives. UNFPA functions well as an independent entity, though with too few resources, and should work closely and collaboratively with a women's agency while maintaining its separate status.

PART THREE

1. THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE UN SYSTEM

The 1945 UN Charter bears repetition. It pledges to “employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of *all peoples*.” But as seen in Parts One and Two of this paper, the women’s machinery – the handful of divisions, departments and commissions devoted to gender equality and women’s development and empowerment -- are the poorest in the UN system, the smallest, the lowest ranking and the least powerful, all but unknown outside of UN circles.

The world looks to the UN to confront gender-based injustice in countries around the world, but a snapshot of the UN itself reveals what we’re willing to tolerate. The organization is run by men; men make the decisions. Among senior policy and decision makers, the ratio of women to men – which should have reached 50/50 by the year 2000 – is actually moving in reverse. Among UN employees in the Secretariat, the proportion of female staff in the senior professional and higher categories is *decreasing*. At the D-1 (deputy director) level and above, the proportion of women in the Secretariat dropped from 29 to 27.2 per cent (or 147 women out of 540) between June 2004 and June 2005.

Advancement towards a 50/50 gender balance at senior levels proceeds at glacial speed, with percentages in 2006 just 2.3 points above 2001 levels. The reason for the slow progress is obvious: women made up just 8 out of 41, or 19.5 per cent of new appointments at the senior levels in 2005.^{xxxix}

Data from the major agencies is also disturbing: examples include the fact that as of 17 July 2006, UNDP senior management was 23 per cent female in the Latin America bureau, 23 per cent female in the Asia Pacific bureau, and 19 per cent female in the bureau for Arab States^{xi}; that UNICEF has allowed a precipitous decline in women at the D2 (director) level over the past three years, from 29 to 19 percent^{xli}; and that in the High Commission for Refugees -- whose target population is 70 percent women and children, and whose last High Commissioner resigned following the outcome of an investigation into sexual harassment charges -- 80 percent of country representatives are men.

Granted, the above percentages deal only with gender parity – never the most important or indicative measure of women’s advancement, but they are highly symbolic of deeper gender inequities, and of the depths of men’s refusal to abdicate power. Performance and trends related to parity in the UN also send a clear signal about the organization’s commitment to all gender goals. Achievement of the initial goal of 50/50 representation at all levels of the UN by 2000 is nowhere close; instead, the target date was revised to 2010. Repeated

requests by the General Assembly to address this failure of performance are meaningless without concomitant support. OSAGI has been allocated just two staff to deal with women's recruitment and advancement within the UN, and none of the necessary tools for the job – no ability to conduct training, to demand accountability of management, to implement special measures for recruiting and retaining qualified women, or to analyze and address the parts of the UN work environment that mitigate against achieving the gender parity goals.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, winner of the 2005 Nobel Prize for Peace, ranks last among UN entities in employing women, though not for lack of trying. As of July 2005, 80 per cent of its professional staff were men. The IAEA website concedes, "The percentage climbs even higher to 86per cent in scientific and engineering positions, which are filled by 72 women and 440 men holding posts as chemists, life scientists, nuclear engineers, physicists, safeguards inspectors, or technical specialists.... Women hold about 16per cent of posts ranked as P-4 or P-5 [middle management], a slow rise since Ms. Mary Jeffreys first broke through in 1962."

Despite one of the most progressive, woman- and family-friendly workplace policies in the UN system (including flex-time, job-sharing, four weeks' paid plus four months' unpaid paternity leave, on-site child care, breastfeeding breaks, employment support for employees' spouses, and a sexual harassment and discrimination policy), even the UN's top scientific minds are stumped by the gender parity equation. In a world that severely limits girls' and women's opportunities to pursue higher education and professional careers, achieving gender parity is not rocket science – it's more complicated than that.

Until real progress is made in women's literacy and education, health, sexual and reproductive rights, economic empowerment and political participation, all the progressive recruitment policies in the world will not lead to 50/50 parity.

Gender parity is not the solution, but it *is* important, for women and the institution as a whole, since actively recruiting the 'best and brightest' men *and* women taps a much larger pool of talent. It also benefits the global population served by the UN: a High-Level Panel consisting of 12 men and 3 women, or 80 per cent men, a General Assembly of 90 per cent men, world governments of 84 per cent men, a senior staff of 73 per cent men -- all leave room for divergent views and varied expertise among men, but not among women. Such ratios create wide, comfortable margins of incompetence for men: if one-quarter of the Coherence Panel's male participants do not contribute adequately or thoughtfully, the male perspective nevertheless maintains an overwhelming majority, and male-dominated decision-making prevails. If the same number of female panelists failed to participate fully, the women's perspective would be entirely lost to the decision-making panel.

Though far from a complete explanation for slow progress on the empowerment of women worldwide, the gender imbalance in the UN's governing and decision-

making bodies plays a role – at the very least, reaffirming that women matter very little. Most such bodies are predominantly male because Member States’ representatives and staff at the most senior levels in the UN system are predominantly male. Even when given the freedom to scan the globe and select special advisors from outside the system, the UN has appointed high-level and expert panel after panel after panel on the most important issues of our times, with inexcusable male-to-female ratios: 12 to 3 (the 2006 High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence...), 12 to 4 (the 2003 High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change), 9 to 2 (2001 High-Level Panel on Financing for Development); 16 to 4 (the 2006 High-Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations). Among the 60 Special Representatives and Deputy Special Representatives now serving as personal appointees of the Secretary-General, 56 are men.

2. CAN A REFORMED UN WORK FOR WOMEN?

This is not the first UN overhaul. In the last six decades, there have been many reform efforts. Never, however, have women been a central focus of reform – and so as strides are made elsewhere, gender equality remains the over-arching failure of the UN, the Achilles’ heel of the multilateral system.

Still today, the thin ranks of senior women in most entities, as outlined above, put *all* UN decision-making in male hands. As part of his 1997 reform agenda, the Secretary-General instituted a range of reforms aimed at modernizing the work of the UN and at better linking the goals of “peace and security, poverty reduction and sustainable human development and the promotion and respect for human rights”. This included the creation of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). The purpose of the UNDG is to “improve the effectiveness of UN development at the country level”. The UNDG is chaired by the UNDP Administrator and brings together agencies working on development. Its Programme Group is tasked with developing “policies, guidelines and procedures to improve the quality and effectiveness of UN Country Team programme collaboration, particularly in support of national efforts to implement the Millennium Declaration and achieve the Millennium Declaration Goals.”^{xlii}

The UNDP Administrator holds two crucial positions: he chairs the UNDG, and he oversees the Resident Coordinator system. This paper has already dealt with one half of that equation: the Resident Coordinator system is not capable of filling the enormous gap at country level where operational capacity to empower women and achieve gender equality should exist, and the world cannot wait for decades while the RC system gets up to speed.

The other half of the UNDP-led equation, at the global level, is just as bleak. As of June 2006, 30 of the UNDG’s 37 members were men.

The “main instrument for executive heads of the UN system to coordinate their actions and policies”^{xliii} is the Chief Executives Board for Coordination, or CEB. The executive heads of 28 organizations sit on the CEB; 24 of the 28 are men. Again, the fact that the women’s entities are not full-fledged UN organizations bars their executive heads from sitting on the CEB (which counts among its members the executive heads of the UN Postal Union and the World Tourism Organization).

In fact, because of their low status, the top officials of the gender entities (among whom an Assistant Secretary-General holds the highest rank) are disqualified from taking part in almost all of the UN’s most important coordination and decision-making bodies. As noted earlier, in spite of the fact that UNIFEM cites HIV/AIDS as one of its four strategic focus areas, it cannot join the 10-member UNAIDS Committee of Co-Sponsoring Organizations. In the forum where decisions are made in response to a pandemic now recognized as having “a woman’s face”, UNDP speaks on behalf of the women’s fund, because UNDP’s Administrator controls the fund’s management and operations.

Taken together, the status of women in the UN; the status of the women’s machinery throughout the UN system; the arrangements at the very top where norms are established and policies are made; and the lack of operational capacity for women’s programmes at country level, where those policies are put into practice, all add up to an incoherent and dangerously outdated United Nations. The prognosis is clear: without a new women’s agency to address the challenges of the new millennium, development will stall, peace will remain elusive, and Member States will never achieve their most desired goals.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UN is undergoing reform, and advocates of women's rights hope that bold changes will end decades of lip service. The international community mouths the goal of equality between men and women, but it has not acted on it.

Across the globe and within the UN system itself, women are oppressed, marginalized, under-represented and neglected. They make up a huge majority of the world's poor, illiterate, exploited and abused, and a tiny minority of decision-makers, power-brokers and influence peddlers. **(See box, p. 18)** Three of every four HIV-positive African youth are female, while fewer than one in ten Ambassadors to the UN are women. Against the goal of a 50/50 staff ratio by 2000, the percentage of senior UN posts filled by women reached a high of 29, and is now moving in reverse.

The UN's "international machinery" has never been made operational for women. Four entities make up the women's machinery: UNIFEM, the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Office of the Secretary-General's Advisor on Gender Issues, and the Institute for Research and Training for the Advancement of Women. All together, they have 101 core staff members and \$65 million to work with. **(See table, p.10)** UNICEF had a budget of over \$2 billion in 2004 to deal with the world's children; that same year, UNIFEM received 2 1/2 per cent of that amount to deal with the world's women. Without operational capacity at the country level, every goal and target, policy and position defending women's rights and advocating their empowerment sits on a shelf, is tossed back and forth in conference halls and meeting rooms dominated by men, and returns to the shelf. **(Tables, pp. 12 and 14)** Without a women's agency, every global goal, including each of the Millennium Development Goals, will be unreachable.

The forces that work against women's empowerment and gender equality are deeply rooted, complex, fiercely defended and, so far, immovable. They are social, cultural, political, psychological...; dismantling them is the work of experts.

In place of gender expertise in various fields – social and economic, political and civil – and in place of targeted programmes to empower women, the UN has taken an inexpensive and entirely ineffective approach. "Gender mainstreaming" assumes – incorrectly – that everyone is an expert on gender. It tacks the difficult business of transforming a gender-biased world onto everyone's job description, making it no one's responsibility, and leaving no one accountable. Assessments by various parts of the UN, donors, NGOs and experts in the field reach the same conclusion: gender mainstreaming is a dangerous, phony substitute for real work towards gender equality. **(See chart, p. 15)** The perpetuation of an approach that doesn't work is proving fatal to women and dangerous for humankind.

The lack of a full-fledged agency to empower women renders all UN agencies, funds and programmes ineffective. Simple logic applies: second-class citizens – poor, illiterate, oppressed, and counter-intuitively, responsible for raising the next generations -- keeps the world anchored in place, unable to develop and progress because only half the global population can contribute and participate fully.

The UN, and the world, need a full-fledged women's agency: operational, with on-the-ground presence in every country, a guaranteed budget -- of \$1 billion to start, increasing by 10 per cent annually to \$2 billion in five years -- and a full complement of expert staff and targeted programmes. (**See box, p. 20**) A women's agency is required so that women's voices can be heard at all levels of society, and in all the decisions that affect their lives. A women's agency is needed to help governments devise and implement targeted programmes to empower women. The UN needs a women's agency to lead – and be accountable for – a 'deep social revolution' throughout the system; its technical experts must not only encourage, but assist *all* UN departments, agencies, funds and programmes to bring a gender perspective to *all* of their work. Top practitioners -- trained, schooled, experienced specialists with particular skills in vital fields – need the infrastructure and resources of a full-fledged women's agency, and the UN system needs such an agency to make all its other programmes truly effective.

The resources exist -- Official Development Assistance is now said to be \$100 billion per year. It requires nothing more than political will to allocate one per cent of that total for half the global population. The pieces exist; they need only be assembled:

The **mission** is stated in the UN Charter.

The legal basis for the **mandate** is established in CEDAW.

The main **purpose and activities** are outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action, and priorities have already been set in its "12 critical areas of concern".

The technical **expertise** can be found in thousands of civil society organizations.

The **governance** structures to use as models, with appropriate adaptation, exist within the UN.

The ideal women's agency envisioned would be a fund or a programme, led by an Under Secretary-General. Because its mandate would extend beyond development and into the political realm – implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, for instance -- and because its governance would benefit from the gender balance and expertise found in non-governmental organizations, the ideal women's agency executive board would have a formal role for civil society, and would report to the full General Assembly. Its funding for staff would be drawn from assessed contributions, or UN dues,

and its funding for programmatic work would be raised from voluntary contributions.

It would have headquarters staffed with technical experts and a budget adequate to support country offices, each with full operational capacity and programme staff: field offices in countries with UN Country Teams, led by Representatives, and regional offices in Geneva, CEE/CIS, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean. It would take the lead in advocacy and communication, collect and analyze data, develop policy, provide technical advice and assistance on gender and women's empowerment in every specialized field; support and monitor the gender-related work of other UN agencies; and work closely with government partners to plan, implement and oversee programmes at the national level. It would work closely with the CEDAW Committee and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which would service the CEDAW treaty body in Geneva. It would establish a formal committee for select joint planning and coordination with key partner agencies including UNFPA and UNICEF. The women's agency would be allocated the necessary core and other staff required to fulfill its goals and purpose, and equivalent in force to UNICEF's, the agency with the most comparable mandate. It would draw in large part – at the outset – from staff seconded from legitimate women's organizations with appropriate expertise. (**See outline, p. 30**)

The crucial reform question facing the UN is whether it can remain relevant in the 21st century while functioning in a bygone era that had little regard for women's human rights. The crucial question for Member States as they strive for world peace and the Millennium Development Goals is not whether governments can afford to create an agency that empowers women, but whether they can afford not to.

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