

**GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER JUSTICE**

**Statement by**

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I would like to thank CONGO for the opportunity to make a contribution to the discussion during this 23<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly on the critical issue of equality and justice. I am especially grateful for the opportunity to discuss equality and justice in relation to women and men – gender equality and gender justice - which is critical for achievement

and Platform for Action – has been in place since 1995 to guide work at national level. The human rights treaty on gender equality – the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – has been ratified by 185 States, and its Optional Protocol by 90 States.

The strong mandates and norms at global level are the result of the focus in the United Nations on gender equality and empowerment of women since its establishment. A separate body was created already in 1946 to work on the “advancement of women”. The Commission on the Status of Women worked from its inception to collect and compile data on women’s situation around the world, to promote women’s human rights

Over and above these institutional factors, an equally important element in the failure to implement is the issue of attitudes. An honest assessment reveals that there is still a strong feeling among many decision-makers within the United Nations and in Member States, that gender equality and gender justice is “just not that important”. As a result, it is often left to gender equality specialists – who are almost always women, often at junior level with little decision-making power, and inevitably under-resourced and lacking strong and visible management support.

A common response to the efforts of gender equality specialists to bring attention to gender perspectives in different areas/issues is that the more important work on policy development and planning must be taken care of first, before attention can be given to issues of gender equality and gender justice. This illustrates a lack of understanding that gender equality has implications for policy development and planning in the areas/issues being considered.

their work have organizational cultures which also do not promote gender equality and gender justice within the organizations.

The Commission works to ensure it can influence the work of other parts of the United Nations through the choice of themes for its annual sessions; by explicitly transmitting its outcomes to other bodies; and by seeking opportunities to collaborate directly with other bodies. For example, with regard to the 2008 session, the Commission chose the priority theme “Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women” to influence the follow-up to the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for development in 2008. The emerging issue: “Gender perspectives on climate change” was chosen to influence the follow-up to the Kyoto Protocol. In 2006 the Commission held a high-level panel discussion on “Gender equality and international migration”, which was transmitted to the General Assembly High-level debate on international migration. The Commission has for a number of years strengthened its collaboration with the Statistics Commission, including through organizing joint panels on gender statistics and indicators.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol is an important accountability mechanism supporting gender equality and empowerment of women at national level. It is a critical instrument which is unfortunately often under-utilized by Governments, the United Nations and NGOs. Ratification of the Convention imposes legal obligations on States to implement its provisions and report regularly (every four years) to the Committee responsible for monitoring implementation. Following the constructive dialogue with States parties, the Committee prepares Concluding Comments or recommendations on

giving responsibility to everyone results in no-one taking any responsibility. In most cases, however, no real responsibility transfer takes place at all and there are no serious attempts to implement gender mainstreaming.

Revitalizing the mainstreaming strategy requires constructively critical assessments of the efforts made, and development of new strategies for systematic and effective implementation, which should include strengthened political will, leadership by top and middle-level management, accountability mechanisms and dedicated resources.

An important but simple framework for the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women has been developed which can be utilized in all policy areas. It requires addressing the following elements, within a human rights framework: development of  through, for example health and education; increased access to  such as employment, credit and land and property rights; strengthened , through for example increased access to decision-making in all areas; and enhanced , for example through eradication of violence against women.

The on-going reform process in the United Nations provides an opportunity to strengthen the work on gender equality and empowerment of women. Since the ten-year review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, it has been clear that there is a need for reform in this area. The review of United Nations' mandates in 2005-2006 highlighted the need to ensure increased coherence and coordination and to reduce the risk of duplication and overlap, particularly in the context of limited resources. Requesting the high-level panel on coherence to consider gender equality as part of its mandate, was part of a move by the Secretary-General to push for greater coherence in this area.

The high-level panel recommended the creation of one gender equality body through the merging of the existing gender-specific entities – the Office of the Special

primary role of the Resident Coordinator and Country Teams and are not expected to take over all responsibility for gender equality and gender justice.

The reform process provides a unique opportunity to revisit the vision of the United Nations in its work for gender equality. What is required is not simply a restructuring of the institutional arrangements in the United Nations. True reform of the

organized during the session which provide both practical and substantive information. Caucuses are held on different themes.

A number of individual NGOs are also undertaking some impressive work in preparing for and following up participation in the Commission. For example, in recent years around 100 Anglican women from around the world have gone through a preparatory programme; been briefed and mentored during the session; and encouraged



The Commission on the Status of Women will consider “Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women” as its priority theme in order to follow-up on the recommendations on financing contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as to influence the preparations for the follow-up to the Monterrey Consensus in Qatar in 2008. The Commission will take up the following critical issues related to resource allocations for gender equality: macro-economic policies; public finance management (including gender-responsive budgets - where NGOs have played a key role in countries around the world); development cooperation; and other innovative sources of funding, including women’s funds. The Commission will also consider resources for critical stakeholders such as national mechanisms for the advancement of women. A important topic of discussion will be the resource situation of women’s groups and networks at global, regional and national levels, since recent research points to a crisis of funding for the women’s movement compared with ten years ago. Women’s groups and networks are struggling to survive and are not able to meet felt needs. The fastest growing source of funding is women’s funds set up by women for women, which specialize in much-needed smaller sized grants.

It is expected that stakeholders will also raise the resource allocation situation in relation to critical issues, such as violence against women and the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. In addition, the resource situation of gender equality work in the United Nations itself will be discussed – including the resource needs of the gender-specific entities (identified in the on-going reform discussions); the lack of resources for serious implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy; and the need for development of mechanisms for more effective tracking of resource allocations for gender equality and gender justice.

NGOs can play a critical role in ensuring that critical issues are discussed at the Commission by preparing official written statements; making strategic oral statements; preparing and disseminating “position papers” on resource needs in critical areas with clear recommendations for action – for example on the funding needs of the women’s movement; organizing parallel events on important issues; and actively lobbying government delegates during the session. A critical role will also be ensuring adequate follow-up at national level, including by monitoring that governments act on commitments made during the session.

### **In conclusion**

Given that the gap between the policy commitments on gender equality and gender justice over the past six decades and actual implementation on the ground is increasingly recognized, it is extraordinary that there is not more outrage and calls for immediate action - particularly when the devastating consequences of the persistent gender inequalities and injustices, on individual women and on society as a whole, are taken into account. It is a development imperative to acknowledge and act on the fact that it is will not be possible to achieve the goals of the development agenda as long as gender inequality and injustice persist.

Systematic and effective achievement of gender equality and gender justice requires moving away from viewing gender inequality and injustice as a sort of “second-grade” inequality and injustice, forced to take a “back-seat” to other “more important” forms of inequality and injustice. In many processes, such as liberation struggles and the fight against racial inequality and injustice, women were often informed that it was necessary to wait for gender equality until the larger freedoms were won. It is time for a better understanding that gender inequality and injustice are inextricably linked to other forms of inequality and injustice. It is not possible to fight some inequalities and injustices without attention to all others. We cannot wait for gender equality and gender justice. Gender inequality and injustice are both part of the causes and consequences of all other inequalities and injustices. Effective work with gender equality and gender justice requires full understanding of the interlinkages with other inequalities and injustices. Similarly, effective efforts to reduce other inequalities and injustices, such as poverty, require explicit attention to gender inequalities and injustice. It is critical to recognize these interlinkages and address them in a coherent manner.

All NGOs –not just women’s NGOs - should play a stronger leadership role in addressing the implementation gap on gender equality and gender justice, through enhanced advocacy, awareness raising, development of innovative methods and piloting of new approaches, and strengthened monitoring of government efforts to implement commitments. NGOS could keep attention focused on the clear message of the Heads of State when they met in 2000 and again in 2005, and hold governments accountable for upholding it in practice: Gender equality and empowerment of women is essential for development in any area, and equality and justice for women is necessary for equality and justice for all.

Thank you.