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New UN Women's body plans to reinforce presence at country level



Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women, briefs media on her organization's priorities for 2011

25 January 2011 – The new United Nations agency promoting women's rights and their full participation in global affairs will reinforce its presence in individual countries, as opposed to relying on regional representation, to more clearly understand the specific problems, its chief said today.

"Probably one of the more important issues is that we intend to strengthen at the country level the national capacity on working with women and that will distinguish the field work. We will continue to get closer to women every day, their reality and to better understand their needs, their concerns," UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet told a news briefing in New York.

"We will be bold and ambitious but also practical in building an organization that can make a lasting difference to women's lives," she said, stressing the enormous capacity that women have as a key for development.

UN Women – known formally as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – was established by the General Assembly in July last year, with the merger of four former UN agencies and offices: the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender

Issues, and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW).

The new agency is set to receive a large boost in funding, eventually reaching \$500 million a year and will be the largest entity ever devoted to eliminating gender discrimination.

Ms. Bachelet, a former president of Chile, laid out the complexities of the problems confronting UN Women. While 96 per cent of the gap between women and men in the field of health and 93 per cent of the gap in education have been closed, 41 per cent of the disparity in economic participation and 82 per cent of that in political empowerment remain to be narrowed.

In remarks to UN Women's executive board yesterday, she laid out five thematic priorities in the country-specific context: expanding women's voice, leadership and participation; ending violence against women; ensuring women's full participation in conflict resolution; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and gender equality priorities central to national, local and sectoral planning and budgeting.

And she cited five core principles: enhancing implementation of international accords by national partners; backing intergovernmental processes to strengthen the global framework on gender equality; advocating gender equality and women's empowerment; promoting coherence within the UN on the issue; and acting as a global broker of knowledge and experience.