



Ban calls on universities to play role in promoting women's empowerment



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

4 April 2011 – Women remain second-class citizens in too many countries, deprived of basic rights or legitimate opportunities, **Secretary-General** Ban Ki-moon said today, calling on universities to help in the fight to overcome discrimination and change perceptions about what women can and should do.

Speaking to the Global Colloquium of University Presidents, held at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Mr. Ban said universities can play “a significant role” in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment.

“They can provide the training in critical thinking that a functional democracy needs,” he said. “They provide a foundation for the economic and medical research that is so essential to society’s well-being. And they supply graduates to the workforce.

“So it is essential that this issue of women’s rights and women’s representation is reflected in your curricula, your appointments, your practices and your partnerships.”

Mr. Ban said it was vital to give girls and young women the inspiration and tools so they have the opportunity to achieve, citing as an example the recent introduction of an all-female unit of Indian police officers to the UN peacekeeping force in Liberia (**UNMIL**).

“There was an immediate practical benefit – women felt safer and they felt more empowered to complain about the abuse they were enduring. But there was another, unanticipated consequence. Liberian women queued up to join their own police service. Because they saw it, they knew they could be it.”

Earlier this year a new UN entity known as UN Women came into being to replace four separate organizations working to advance the rights of women worldwide.

The Secretary-General said recent events in the Middle East and North Africa, where public protests for greater freedoms have led to the downfall of two governments, highlighted the need for such a body.

“In conversation after conversation in Cairo and Tunis, women told me that they stood shoulder-to-shoulder with men – standing up for change, for rights, for opportunity. They expect to take their share in making the revolution succeed, having their fair share of power, making decisions, making policy.

"I told them that women represent half the population, they hold up half the sky, and should have their fair share in making the decisions that affects their lives and their countries."

Mr. Ban stressed that while the rights of women have come a long way in the past century, women are second-class citizens in too many countries today.

"Too many women, in too many countries, have no other role beyond marrying and producing children at a young age, then taking care of those families.

"Although the gender gap in education is closing, far too many girls are still denied schooling, leave prematurely, or complete school with few skills and fewer opportunities. Two-thirds of illiterate adults are female.

"In the area of decision-making, we see more women, in more countries, taking their rightful seat in parliament. Yet fewer than 10 per cent of countries have female heads of State or government. In just 28 countries are there more than 30 per cent of women in parliament."

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