

New UN entity to be 'strong champion' of gender equality, says its new chief



Head of UN Women Michelle Bachelet

22 September 2010 – The first head of the new United Nations super-agency on female empowerment today voiced hope that the body will be a “strong champion” of gender equality and hasten existing UN efforts to advance the cause of women and girls.

The UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women was established on 2 July by a unanimous vote of the General Assembly to oversee all of the world body’s programmes aimed at promoting women’s rights and their full participation in global affairs.

Known as **UN Women**, it will help Member States implement standards, provide technical and financial support to countries which request it, and forge partnerships with civil society. Within the UN, it will hold the world body accountable for its own commitments on gender equality.

Michelle Bachelet, former Chilean president and head of UN Women, told reporters in New York today that the body’s creation is “clearly a huge opportunity to significantly accelerate all the efforts that the UN system has made in order to achieve better conditions for women.”

She pointed out that while the UN has made great advances in promoting gender equality, it faces serious challenges, including inadequate funding, as well as fragmentation “with no single recognized driver to direct UN activities.”

UN Women is the merger of 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**).

“We now need to move forward or otherwise UN priorities such as addressing the high level of violence and discrimination faced by women and girls” will not succeed, Ms. Bachelet warned.

Other areas she said she will focus on are reducing maternal mortality by 2015, one of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today began a massive drive to save the lives of over 16 million women and children, with more than \$40 billion already committed to scale up health services worldwide.

The UN Women chief also spotlighted how women are the ones who have lost more opportunities as a result of the global recession.

She cited figures from the UN International Labour Organization (**ILO**) that nearly 19 million more women have become unemployed as a result of the downturn.

“Even when women are employed, they still have very low incomes, low wages and also they have very little access to credit,” Ms. Bachelet said.

For UN Women to “make an important difference,” Member States must step up their financial commitments, she stressed.

The body’s starting budget of \$500 million – twice the current combined resources of the four agencies it comprises – is “at least the minimum that is annually needed,” Ms. Bachelet said, urging countries to back their political commitment with the funding necessary.

“I look forward... to [making] UN Women the strong champion for women’s rights and equal opportunity for all women and girls as women and girls deserve.”

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