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UN officials urge greater support for empowering women on International Day



Number of researchers in developing countries is rising, but women still in minority

8 March 2010 – Top United Nations officials are marking International Women’s Day by calling for greater support to women, particularly in developing countries, so that they can be empowered and contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**), the eight globally agreed anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline.

In his **message** for the Day, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed that “the third Millennium Development Goal – to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment – is central to all the rest. When women are denied the opportunity to better themselves and their societies, we all lose.

“Until women and girls are liberated from poverty and injustice, all our goals – peace, security, sustainable development – stand in jeopardy,” he added.

The International Labour Organization (**ILO**) also joined the call for equal rights and equal opportunities for all, with Director-General Juan Somavia noting that the global economic crisis is threatening recent advances in the field of women and work.

A new report by the agency on women in labour markets shows that a new gender gap may be emerging. “Although women’s overall labour force participation is growing, women remain disproportionately represented in poorly paid, insecure, part-time, home-based or informal work and continue to be undervalued when it comes to equal pay for work of equal value,” he **stated**.

Mr. Somavia added that the economic crisis is also an opportunity to shape new gender equality policy responses. “When governments design and implement fiscal stimulus

packages, for example, it is important to recognize the labour market disadvantages that women may face.

“Women carry the heaviest burden when it comes to unpaid care work. This may expand as the crisis deepens and further limits women’s access to labour markets if policies for sharing care responsibilities with men are not forthcoming,” he said.

The UN Development Fund for Women (**UNIFEM**) and the UN corporate responsibility initiative known as the Global Compact today launched a new joint initiative called **Women’s Empowerment Principles**, which offers guidance on how to empower women in the workplace.

“The ‘multiplier effect’ of women’s empowerment has been increasingly acknowledged,” UNIFEM Executive Director Inés Alberdi told a news conference in New York. “What is powerful and new today is that the corporate community itself reports that gender equality is good for business — advancing innovation, attracting top talent, raising positive consumer and community recognition and improving profits.”

Among other elements, the initiative calls for establishing high-level corporate leadership for gender equality, and promoting education, training and professional development for women.

Kandeh K. Yumkella, the Director-General of the UN Industrial Development Organization (**UNIDO**), stated that the key to enhancing opportunities for women in the developing world and lifting them out of poverty is to provide them with skills, know-how, technologies and finance to enable them to engage in productive activities and earn an income.

Speaking in Abuja, Nigeria, where he is attending a high-level conference on the development of agribusiness and agri-industries in Africa, Mr. Yumkella noted that ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women is crucial if developing countries want to achieve the other MDGs.

UNIDO’s efforts focus on achieving four of the eight MDGs, including on promoting gender equality and empowering women.

“If women are able to access credit to invest in business ventures, markets to sell their products, knowledge to expand their businesses, they will be in a better position to contribute to economic growth and development,” he **stated**.

This year’s International Women’s Day comes on the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 – which remains the most comprehensive global policy framework to achieve the goals of gender equality, development and peace.

World leaders attending the summit in the Chinese capital declared that the full participation by women in all spheres of society, including decision-making and access to power, are fundamental for development and peace.

“We will not see sustainable progress unless we fix failures in health systems and society so that girls and women enjoy equal access to health information and services, education, employment and political positions,” said the head of the World Health Organization (**WHO**).

Margaret Chan added that International Women’s Day is a day of celebration and reflection on how to eliminate discrimination against women and girls. “Today we must all join forces to make sure that the health of women and girls is not jeopardized simply because they were born female.”

Also marking the Day, General Assembly President Ali Treki called for resolving to guarantee women equal and full rights and opportunities which will enable them to contribute their full potential to the objectives of peace and development.

“Let us work to eliminate all forms of gender-based discrimination, not only by making sure that there are no existing laws that directly discriminate against women, but also by ensuring that all necessary arrangements are in place that will allow women to actually experience equality in their lives,” Dr. Treki added in a statement.

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