

UN Women and Civil Society Engagement

[November 2010] Recently, GEAR representatives met with the new USG and head of UN Women, Michelle Bachelet. We took this opportunity to explain the evolution of the GEAR Campaign and its membership, and outline key messages regarding the importance of civil society organizations (CSO) engagement and the participation of global to local grassroots organizations in UN Women. Ms Bachelet stated she viewed the meeting as the start of a 'partnership' and welcomed civil society input and continued engagement as UN Women develops.

One of the principles of the GEAR Campaign is to ensure that UN Women is both accountable to and informed by civil society, especially women's organizations, through the establishment of mechanisms that include meaningful participation at headquarters and at the regional and country level. GEAR presented the attached revised paper "**Civil Society Participation and UN Women**" (November 2010) to Ms. Bachelet and highlighted the five recommendations for making this systematic which have emerged from on-going GEAR Campaign discussions. We hope many civil society groups will support these recommendations and seek their implementation by UN women locally and globally.

Ms. Bachelet agreed that women's CSO's and grassroots organizations are well placed to provide significant programming and policy expertise on how the UN and Member States can advance women's human rights and achieve gender equality. She is now exploring different options for the most effective ways to engage with civil society at headquarters, regional and country levels. UN Women is currently engaged in both short term and longer term strategic planning to determine its priorities and areas of work. Those in the planning process must consider where UN Women should continue or take action and leadership; what issues are other UN actors engaged in and thus the role of UN Women will be more one of coordination and suggestions for other programs. Ms. Bachelet welcomed civil society suggestions in both the short and long term process.

FIRST 100 DAYS OF UN WOMEN: WHAT CAN YOU DO?

UN Women is looking now at what it can do in the first 100 days (beginning with January 1, 2010) to achieve some "quick impact" and/ or signal significant directions for its work. Civil society, especially women's national and grassroots organizations, can participate in this by offering practical examples of what UN Women can do and be at each level. We suggest doing this by:

- Recommending early actions that could be taken during the first 100 days of UN Women to demonstrate its new direction;
- Providing input or recommendations to shape what early successes in UN Women might look like;
- Organizing meetings of civil society groups with local and regional UN staff (such as resident coordinators, gender focal points, previous UNIFEM staff, etc.) to discuss the directions and structures of UN Women's work at national and regional levels.



This can provide GEAR Campaign members with a critical entry-point to start practically influencing UN Women's agenda and an opportunity to demonstrate how civil society engagement is effective and necessary.

We welcome and encourage CSO's and grassroots organizations to hold such meetings locally, nationally, regionally and/or globally by geographic or thematic interests. It will be useful if you can submit to the UN (at any level) as well as share with GEAR any concrete ideas that your organization would propose to UN Women for the first 100 days. The recommendations should be as specific as possible and aim at **interventions/tangible examples that can demonstrate:**

- **Process:** an example of how to effectively engage with civil society,
- **Product:** a short-term tangible (albeit symbolic) result,
- **Agenda setting:** provides a direction to guide longer-term work on a given thematic area.

ON-GOING & LONGER TERM SUGGESTIONS FOR UN WOMEN

UN Women will also begin a longer term strategic planning process in January and seeks stakeholder participation in this. As the **GEAR "Civil Society Call to Action" (July 2010)** suggests, civil society and grassroots organizations need to be proactive about being in touch with UN Women at every level – both making suggestions about structures for engagement and about longer-term ongoing strategies and agendas for UN Women.

A number of national, regional and thematic groups are already taking such action and making proposals for UN Women's structures and direction. For example, a group of civil society organizations working for women's rights in Pakistan met and formed a Civil Society Alliance on UN Women that presents their perspectives and recommendations on functions, structures, role of civil society and budgets to their government as well as to UN Women locally and globally. Other coalitions of NGOs have focused on themes such as Women, Peace and Security or Socio-Economic Justice for Women and are making suggestions for how UN Women can advance women's empowerment and rights in these areas.

We suggest that groups reflect on their work, joint initiatives or conferences and meetings, etc. and identify innovative interventions and issues where UN Women can make a difference with 'quick impact' and/or longer term strategies moving forward. We need to go beyond what others should do and offer recommendations that your organization is willing to work towards and help implement.

Civil Society has a rare opportunity to participate in building a new UN body for gender equality and women's empowerment and GEAR calls on all civil society groups committed to these goals to pro-actively engage in this process. **We encourage you to send your ideas to all the relevant national, regional, and global UN actors directly and to engage with them where possible. Please also send this information to the GEAR Campaign (email: gearcampaign@gmail.com) by the first week of December. We will then review, consolidate and provide this information to the USG in mid-December as well.**

The Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign

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