

PRESS STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

6th December, 2010.

Representatives of African Women's Organizations meet with Under Secretary – General of the UN Women Ms. Michelle Bachelet

United Nations under Secretary General for the UN Women Ms. Michelle Bachelet says she is in the process of developing a clear vision and plan for the first 100 days (three months) after the UN Women becomes operational on the 2nd of January 2011 and has since called on UN member states and other stakeholders like women's organizations and networks to provide concrete ideas that can inform this plan. Ms. Bachelet said this during a meeting she had with representatives of African Women leaders drawn from regional women's organizations and networks who met with her on 26th November, 2010 at the Transition offices of the UN Women in New York.

The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) together with a wide range of African women's organizations, activists and members of the Africa Feminist Forum (AFF), organized to meet with Ms. Bachelet to start conversations regarding the vision for the UN Women. FEMNET in partnership with the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), the convener of the African Feminist Forum and with the support of Urgent Action Fund – Africa facilitated a high level delegation of African women leaders to travel to New York to meet with the newly appointed head of the UN Women. FEMNET is a focal point organization for Africa in the Network of the Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign.

The delegation of African women leaders included Dr. Thelma Awori, Chairperson, Isis – WICCE, Dr. Hilda Tadia Chairperson, AWDF Ms. Ticky Monekosso Treasurer, FAS, Ms. Imane Belghiti **Association Nationale AL HIDN (Consultative Status with ECOSOC, UN)** GEAR Campaign, Focal Point North Africa/ Board Member, FEMNET and Ms. Norah Matovu Winyi Executive Director, FEMNET.

Ms. Bachelet mentioned that the policy team within the UN Women will make deliberate efforts to develop new and compelling arguments for supporting women's empowerment and gender equality programmes (WEGE). These could be political, social or economic arguments, which will be used in persuading member states to prioritize these issues in their national plans and budget allocations and monitor closely the impact of the programmes. The arguments for supporting WEGE will also be relevant to the resource mobilization efforts in order for the UN Women to achieve the initial budget of US D 500 million.

Key points raised by Ms. Michelle Bachelet during the meeting

1. The UN Women is open to dialogue with different stakeholders as one of the strategies to ensure that it remains relevant, responsive and well informed about the priority issues in each region of the world.

2. Currently the UN Women is undertaking a capacity assessment across the regions to ascertain whether its human resource capacity and presence on the ground are well aligned with the needs and responses required in different countries and regions. There is commitment to rationalize the distribution of its resources and this will be based on clearly defined programmes derived from the priorities identified for different regions and countries.
3. The UN Women is committed to develop gender justice arguments that are more compelling to leaders from different countries in order to build the required momentum within the UN and member states to accelerate work on WEGE including the issue of violence against women and girls.

Ms. Bachelet specifically appreciated the decision of African women leaders to meet with her at this time when the UN Women is in its formative stage. This she said “is strategic, and we are ready to listen and identify ideas to incorporate in the short term, and longer term plans of the UN Women.”

Ms. Bachelet stated that she considered the meeting with African women leaders as a very good start of a partnership that will be beneficial to her work and that of the UN Women. She welcomed the input of African women and different organizations and confirmed the interest for continued engagement as the UN Women develops.

During the meeting the African women leaders emphasized the need for the UN Women to have clear mechanisms for continued engagement with African women’s organizations that are based and operating within the continent as they have firsthand experience of organizing around women’s rights and other development issues at various levels. Therefore, the regional and national level structures/mechanisms that will facilitate dialogue and meaningful participation should be transparently established. Members noted that women organizations have the capacity to mobilize and facilitate regional wide consultations on various issues and the UN Women can tap into this experience and expertise. They also called for;

- a) Programs that are being supported by the UN Women directly or through other UN bodies and partners in civil society to focus on women’s economic empowerment and rights, peace and security and the elimination of all forms of violence that manifest in the private and public life of women and girls.
- b) Urgent attention to the need for more African women’s representation within the UN generally and the UN Women in particular both at headquarter level and in the field.
- c) The appointment of a feminist economist to engage in the design and formulation of new and alternative macroeconomic models that respond appropriately to the needs of African women.
- d) A visit to Africa within the first 100 days plan for the UN Women. This would accord the Under Secretary- General an opportunity to personally bring the UN Women closer to the people in Africa.
- e) Close cooperation between the UN Women, African governments and African women organizations and networks to review the way indicators of progress for achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment are developed. The indicators for example that are used to measure progress on maternal health do not necessarily capture the gender issues that contribute to high maternal mortality rates in Africa. The UN Women’s indicators of progress should be meaningful and appropriate for the African context.

- f) A special session convened by the UN Women during the 2011 CSW 55th Session for the USG to meet with a wider group of civil society actors. This will be yet another opportunity for the UN Women to hear the voices of women from all parts of the world.

The delegation promised to follow up the representatives of the 10 African countries that are members of the Executive Board of the UN Women to encourage them to also link up with African women organizations for consultations on how best to build a strong UN Women that can provide support to their work in this area. To ensure that this commitment is followed up with concrete actions, the delegation made contact with the Nigerian Mission to the UN in New York and Dr. Thelma Awori met with the Nigerian Ambassador Professor Joy Ogwu before she left New York.

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Note to Editors:

On Friday, July 2 the United Nations General Assembly formally adopted a Resolution that includes the establishment of “UN Women,” the new gender equality agency at the UN. The formal name is the [UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women](#). (A/64/L.56). This momentous action is the result of years of negotiations between UN Member States and advocacy by the global women’s movement. It is aimed at accelerating progress in meeting the needs of women and girls worldwide. This achievement is part of the UN efforts to achieve coherence in its systems and programming on matters relating to Gender equality and the women’s empowerment agenda and bringing together its resources and mandates for in this area for greater impact.

The main roles of UN Women are:

- To support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in formulating policies, global standards and norms and monitoring progress in implementing the decisions made by the UN relating to GE WE.
- To help Member States to implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- To hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality, including regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

More information is available on the UN Women Website: <http://www.unwomen.org/about-un-women>