



To: Ministers of Foreign Affairs of EU Member States
To: Ministers in charge of Gender Equality of EU Member States
To: Permanent Missions of the EU Member States to the UN
To: European Commissioner for Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Viviane Reding

24 March 2010

Your Excellency,

We are writing you today on behalf of the European Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign Working Group concerning the current phase of discussion around the establishment of the new UN women's rights agency. The United Nations General Assembly's (UNGA) decision of last September to create a new UN women's agency by merging the existing gender structures into one **is a once in a lifetime opportunity**. It is an opportunity **to change the status quo on women's rights and gender equality worldwide**, and one that will not come back very soon.

We would like to call on you and your colleagues to ensure that the reform of the current UN gender equality architecture will have a truly transformative outcome. In fact, it is critical "to get this reform right" by creating an agency that has impact to the benefit of women and girls everywhere, especially the poorest and most marginalized women and girls. We share this responsibility with you.

While you and your colleagues are discussing elements of the resolution launching the new women's rights entity that the 64th UNGA is expected to adopt, we would like to emphasize what the key features of this new agency should be:

- The agency **needs to be in the driver's seat** and equipped with a clear mandate to **lead the women's rights and gender equality work of the UN system at country level**. Despite the huge needs and commitment, existing structures in which the UN organizes its country level operations have had little or no impact on the lives of women and girls. In addition, the small gains that have been made, threaten to be reversed by the global economic and financial crisis. Long-term programming that promotes and protects women's rights is required for the system to have an impact and achieve sustainable development. An advisory role of the new agency at country level is insufficient to achieve this objective.
- The agency **needs to support and collaborate formally and systematically with civil society at all levels**. Women's rights and gender equality issues are far too complex for any institution to try and solve them on their own. CSOs, in particular women's rights organizations, have played a major role in supporting policies and services in relation to women's rights and gender equality. CSO collaboration should be part of the portfolio of every staff member in the agency's country, regional and global representation, in addition

to designating a formal contact point at all of these levels. It is critical to effective country level work that the agency supports and partners with all stakeholders, in particular actors with proven expertise and commitment towards women's rights and gender equality.

- The entity must be **able to hold the entire UN system to account for its gender mainstreaming obligations and women's rights work**. This means a leading role for the agency in supporting, coordinating, and evaluating the UN's gender-mainstreaming efforts.
- **The monitoring of governments in their implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action and other intergovernmental agreements** should be a key function of the new women's rights entity. Given the often slow pace in implementing women's rights and gender equality agreements, tracking progress is all the more essential to achieve the common goal of gender equality.
- The new entity must be **ambitiously funded with 1 billion US dollars per year**; with annual increments in order **to ensure it is able to operate at country level with impact**. The World Bank has estimated that \$83.2 billion US dollars are needed by 2015 to achieve MDG 3 and fund related gender-mainstreaming activities in low-income countries. Clear targets and timelines for scaling up funding overtime need to be established.

Over the past few years, and while this process has been unfolding, the EU has demonstrated great leadership and vision on how the UN system can work better for women and girls. Now that important decisions are taken by you and your colleagues, it is all the more important that the EU continues to show that leadership by ensuring the agency is in the driver's seat at country level.

We thank you for your efforts and trust in your leadership and vision.

Sincerely yours,

The European Women's Lobby
The International Gender Policy Network
Oxfam Novib
The UK Gender and Development Network
WIDE – Women in Development Europe

The networks making up the European GEAR Campaign Working Group represent almost 3000 member organisations and millions of women and men across the EU and Europe.