

**PREPARATORY MEETING FOR 2005 ECOSOC
HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT
16-17 March 2005**

“Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits: progress made, challenges and opportunities”

ROUNDTABLE 5: GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: Strengthening institutions to deliver on commitments to gender equality and women’s empowerment

Chair: H.E. Mr. Jaime Moncayo Garcia (Ecuador) Vice-President of ECOSOC

Lead Organizer: UNIFEM¹

Moderator: Ms. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM.

BACKGROUND NOTE

The 10-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), which took place in New York from 28 February – 11 March 2005, confirmed that there has been uneven progress toward achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment. The normative environment at all levels – national, regional and international – has improved considerably, following on a wide range of complementary commitments to achieve gender equality. The United Nations world conferences of the 1990s produced the Beijing PFA, as well as considerable commitments to gender equality in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD), the World Conference on Human Rights, and others. These have strengthened and spearheaded related commitments, including ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by over 179 countries, the historic passage of Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, commitment to Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and recognition that gender equality is central to all other goals. Most importantly, at national level, national machineries for women, national plans of action for women’s advancement, and a wide array of laws and policies have emerged in well over 100 countries to create a more conducive environment for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Yet, as the 10-year review confirmed, gender-based violence continues unabated and too often with impunity. Women and girls comprise a disproportionate number of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. In conflict situations, they also experience multiple insecurities as refugees and internally displaced. Women’s poverty is exacerbated by the multiple demands on their time, by their preponderance in informal and insecure work and as a result of gender discrimination in all countries.

¹ Other collaborators include DESA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO and the Millennium Project.

In moving from agreements to action, the work of transforming institutions to become accountable to gender equality commitments is central to achieving the internationally agreed goals and targets, including the MDGs and the vision set out in the Millennium Declaration. While formal rules may specify non-discrimination, institutions often operate according to unwritten values and rules that continue to marginalize the persons, interests, needs and concerns of certain groups, such as the poor, women, the displaced. Until the institutions that influence women's ability to secure their rights – institutions of justice, of governance, of economic policy-setting, of humanitarian relief, of peace-building and the multi-lateral system itself – align their policies and practices with agreed commitments, the advances in the normative environment will fail to be implemented.

Bold new thinking on transformation in institutions, including in conflict and post-conflict settings, to deliver on gender equality is needed. This new thinking must form the basis for new terms of engagement between the key stakeholders in this process: women and men in poor and displaced communities, civil society organizations, local and national governance institutions, policy makers, donors and others. It must also infuse the institutional architecture to support action on gender equality – national machineries for the advancement of women, women's civil society networks and organizations, gender equality networks and units, and equal opportunity offices – to ensure that they have the recognition, resources and position to be able to take part as well as provide technical support and influence stronger action going forward.

This panel will explore how institutions are responding – or failing to respond – to forward agreed commitments in the context of the MDGs and the upcoming Millennium Summit +5. It will present views on the 'deep structures' of institutions that perpetuate gender discrimination and provide examples of how, based on emerging literature and successful examples on the ground, changes are beginning to emerge.² The panel will describe how multi-stakeholder partnerships, broad-based participation, and support for gender equality goals within the broader public can contribute to sustained transformation toward gender equality, identifying promising practices as well as institutional blockages. The panel will also examine how we can make sure these institutions include and work with marginalized and excluded groups. Specific examples from institutions responsible for peace and security, access to justice, economic policy-making, and multi-lateral development cooperation will form the basis of the discussion.

² 'Deep structures' refers to the informal values, cultures, behaviors, and rules of working of institutions that influence and often quietly determine whether oft repeated principles of gender equality can actually be operationalized in practice.