



network

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Dear Colleagues,

Our work during this period has focused on monitoring data on the status of women in the UN and the UN system, participating in the central review bodies, working on individual cases and carrying out a study on the causes for the slow progress towards reaching our gender parity targets. In addition, network provides updates on new appointments and recent initiatives around the UN.

In the Secretariat, two new allies have strengthened the work for equal opportunities for women and men: Ms. Catherine Bertini, as the head of the Department of Management; and Ms. Rosemary McCreery, as the head of the Office of Human Resources Management. This issue of network has two very interesting interviews, offering points of view from different perspectives, thoughts and suggestions. Through the first interview, you will have the opportunity to get to know Ms. McCreery better. In the other interview, Ms. Ruth Diamint, a woman in a “non-traditional” position, talks about her experience as Adviser to the Ministry of Defence in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

We would like to thank you for the feedback you have sent us during the year and look forward to hearing from you again in 2004. By the time you receive this issue of network, we will be well into the New Year.

The Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the staff at the Focal Point office wish you a successful, healthy and safe year in your work and personal lives! As of February 2004, Netta Avedon from OHRM will join us as new Acting Focal Point.

Warm regards,

Angela E. V. King, Sylvia Hordosch, Hanya Salah, Rebeca Dain and Marjorie George

Interview with Ms. Rosemary McCreery, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management

17 November 2003

Ms. Rosemary McCreery started her career in the civil service in Ireland, including two years in the Department of Foreign Affairs. She joined the United Nations as a United Nations Volunteer in 1979, spending two years in Togo setting up the UNICEF office there. After that, she worked for UNICEF in Madagascar and Indonesia, and took a two-year break from the UN in the late 1980s. In 1990, Ms. McCreery returned to UNICEF to establish the office in Romania, the first UNICEF presence in Eastern Europe since the post-war period. From there, she came to New York to be Deputy Director of UNICEF's Department of Human Resources until 1998, when she was appointed head of the Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In 2000, she became UNICEF representative for Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, a post she held until she moved to New York in September 2003 to take up the post of Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management. Ms. McCreery is married with three stepchildren and three step-grandchildren.

1. In your experience as a senior-level woman, do you believe that awareness of gender issues has been incremental in the UN? What are the particular issues that career women have faced in the past and today?

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Rosemary McCreery



When I started my UN career in UNICEF, in 1979, the working environment in the United Nations was heavily male-dominated. One of the biggest problems women faced was that we were judged based on lower standards, and we were not expected to perform as well as our male colleagues. Success was not expected from us. These feelings negatively influenced, generally, the confidence of women in themselves. Because the expectations were so low, when a woman achieved the goals, it was a surprise for everyone in the office, not an expected standard. Men and women were judged differently, and women themselves were not confident that they could perform as well as their male colleagues.

In the UN, as in most organizations with well-established selection systems for promoting and recruiting, managers still tend to choose and promote people they know, and during the early 1980s, most networks consisted of men. Women were pretty isolated and had not yet started building on their own networks. This constituted a barrier for women's progression. But I must wonder if this is not still applicable, because in the working environment men prefer to socialize with men and women with women, a bit of a "ghetto" effect caused by the affinity of the sexes. Although things have changed a great deal, and now it is easier for women to advance professionally, obstacles still remain for women to achieve professionally. Most women in the United Nations are in the General Service category, and there is a problem of what to do with the talent gathered and how best to cross to the Professional category.

2. As an executive woman, do you believe that women are forced to make more personal choices because the working environment is not gender-friendly? Do you have any regrets?

Young Professional women still confront a series of traditional obstacles, although I am happy to say that now women have greater expectations about their careers and are more confident than we were, as they can match their careers with successful private lives as well. When women of my age group started, we didn't dare to speak about our personal lives. Personal issues were not discussed in the work environment, and the idea of having dual-career families was not envisaged by many of us. When I started at UNICEF, women were mostly single and/or divorced, and now this pattern has changed. Most women find themselves in their mid-career with partners and families, two or more children, and they expect to combine all this with a successful UN career. It is good to see my young women colleagues with high expectations, because we didn't have them.

However, I believe that women still have to make more personal choices than men, because society in general is geared towards facilitating the working lives of men.

I am happy to watch my younger colleagues and see that they want to have it all. Yet, from my experience, I still believe that there is a personal cost to combine career, children and an executive life. Women need to be ready to make choices, and sometimes they are very hard choices. It is almost impossible to have it all. Married women with children in senior positions in the UN were the exception; today it is becoming more common, although they are small minorities.

When I made my own choices, I knew what I was deciding. At present, I have no regrets. Yet, in hindsight, and perhaps as a role model for younger colleagues, I want to alert them that the executive path is extremely demanding. Through my UN experience, I have a broader approach and understanding of where my interests lie, and what I have learned has amply compensated me. I love my work and would do it the same way again, if given the possibility.

3. What are your thoughts on mobility and how it affects women's careers?

In most cultures, men's needs are still more important than women's, and their careers take preference over women's. For instance, if a husband/partner needs to follow the woman to another posting, it generally becomes a problem, while the reverse is almost routine. That is to say, women will abandon their careers and move along with their husbands. This happened generally until very recently. In more progressive cultures, some men assume a dual-career role without problems. But I must say that the majority is still being influenced by cultural expectations, the idea being that when the man gives up something, it is always more important than if a woman does. Decisions on who will follow whom still remain bitter arguments in dual-career fami-

lies. It is hard for partners to sacrifice their own career expectations. The concept of dual careers while staying in one duty station is not complicated, but when mobility is expected and demanded it becomes very difficult, especially when the choice has to be made by the woman and the husband has to follow. Given the new mandates received from Member States, mobility is becoming a requirement for staff in the UN Secretariat, and this will force dual-career families to make tough decisions.

Also, in many ways the international field environment is more difficult than before; places that were secure and safe for family life are no longer so; and duty stations that were family-oriented before are not so now. Exigencies of service force women to be mobile, and this in turn becomes a big family decision. I believe that women bear the burden in making decisions when they are to move with their families; this is particularly true while considering children's education. The questions concerning a move are, among others, personal safety, security, medical facilities, education and the ability for a partner to work.

4. What are your thoughts and experiences on spousal employment as it relates to women and mobility?

It is a very difficult area. If you are the head of a big programme in country *x* and you get a letter saying that somebody is transferring with a spouse who doesn't belong to the UN system but seeks employment, this is very seldom the perfect match. When you are in a small duty station, it is almost impossible to achieve. The problem of spousal employment is not unique to the UN, but exists in most foreign services and international companies. What happens sometimes in the foreign service of different countries is that in a dual-career family one person has a career in the consulate and the other is a diplomat. To make a comparison with the UN, the diplomat could be translated into being a Professional, while the spouse working in the consulate could be working as a General Service staff member. This is easier to accommodate than if two people are both Professionals. Newly recruited people have to be told clearly that there are no guarantees of spousal employment in the UN; in addition, staff are expected to be mobile, and if they want dual careers in perpetuity, the UN is not the right place for them. I believe that the UN has to be more vigorous in explaining these circumstances.

Spousal employment is particularly a barrier for women for the reasons mentioned in my previous answer; and again, let me stress that it may not be fair, but it is a difficult problem to get around. A recurrent problem we are facing is that we ask our managers to seek the best-qualified people, but then we say to them that there is an expectation to recruit a spouse, who is accompanying the new recruit or newly promoted staff. OHRM would like to negotiate better host-country agreements with various Governments to allow spouses to work in the duty stations. This is presently being worked on.

5. How would you like to see the work environment becoming friendlier towards work/life issues?

It is so important for us, as an organization, to recognize that women face particular problems. For example, UNICEF had long ago instituted a policy to assist women to breastfeed, and the Secretariat has now reintroduced a similar policy. The Organization has to be mindful also that sometimes women need to take a break in their careers to assume responsibility for elderly parents, and they should not be punished for doing so. I think we need to improve our paternity-leave policy. Such a policy would increase the long-term productivity of employees, as having both parents at home would help to form a solid family, which would have fewer problems later on. However, there is a limited response from our bureaucracy. This issue is also going to be reviewed, but the response has been slow so far. We also need to be more liberal with leave without pay. On the other hand, we are starting now to review the implementation and success of the new policies on flexible working arrangements, with the intention of adjusting them as necessary. The UN needs to be more tolerant. It may be easier to implement these arrangements at Headquarters than in the field. But we need to provide a working environment that allows staff members to balance their careers with their personal lives.

6. Does having women in leadership positions make a difference in an organization, and if so how?

I strongly believe that women in leadership positions make a difference. UNICEF, in 1985, set targets on gender, but no considerable progress was made until a significant number of women in decision-making positions were recruited. Women in leadership roles bring a different dimension to management. This is no panacea and problems don't disappear immediately, but women make a difference in the working environment. It was with the nomination of women executive directors in UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP that significant changes on gender representation came about, and with it, the introduction of more liberal work/life policies. Senior women also became role models and have thus changed the perception that women can't aspire to the top. So expectations to rise to the top became the norm for women, not the exception as before. Women leaders have brought in new management practices that emphasize the importance of integrating different ethnicities and gender into the workplace.

When there is talk about women supervisors, they are generally judged in a harsher tone than men by their peers—both men and women. But again, in my view, it is hard to generalize. I tend to believe that women are more inclined to have more open communication with their staff, and that they are good listeners and tend to be less disruptive. They may have greater negotiation abilities. But again, do I believe women are better managers than men? Yes and no, I am not sure! But what I know is that a harsh word from a woman is often perceived as worse than from a man. I would like to add, though, that super-

visory styles have changed. Women of my generation were largely successful because they followed male patterns of behaviour. No marks were given for being “female” or feminine. And for those of us who were rewarded, it was mostly for playing the game along with the “boys”. It was our male-type behaviour that took us far. Today I hope to see women being women, without trying to be anything else than successful women. This was a big issue with us.

7. How do you view women's capacity for networking, mentoring and supporting other women's career opportunities?

In my personal experience, I don't remember ever being mentored, either by a man or a woman. When women become mobile and work in different duty stations, it is hard to keep up networks in international and national settings. I am not sure whether mentoring would have made a big difference in my career progression, but now it is a different setting and a different time. What I believe is important to have at times is a senior colleague to talk to and express one's anxieties and frustrations, and to ask pertinent questions on how to go about making career choices. This would help each staff member to better understand the system we are working under. At more senior levels, one very useful place to develop networks is during personnel management training. Many groups have remained in touch and worked with each other, supporting and networking.

Working in New York, it is easier for a staff member to have a peer group or network, but it is hard to develop and sustain one while serving in different duty stations. For me, the desire to be a mentor is not gender-specific, but a very personal choice. Networks are very important and should be encouraged, but not only women to women, or men to men, but mixed as well.

8. What advice would you give to other women to improve their career development? What has helped you more than anything to move on?

My career progression was due in part to the fact that in UNICEF I was sent to different duty stations where I was the only international staff member. It was like being a big fish in a small pond. I had the chance to learn all aspects of programme management, implementation and monitoring, and I suppose part of my success is due to this; had I stayed in New York, things might have been different. During my field experience, I had no concern about certain issues, as my degree of autonomy allowed me to progress faster. People need to know what they are getting into, what the implications are of following a UN career and making the choices that go with it—and having no regrets. In particular, we should not blame the Organization for being forced to make choices. Increasingly, our mandate is becoming more complex and more challenging, and a major part of that challenge is a growing demand for peacekeeping. Women as well as men should be ready to discharge these mandates.

Appointments of women to UN bodies ...

The Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) at its 17th meeting on 7 November 2003 made recommendations to the General Assembly regarding new appointments to the **United Nations Administrative Tribunal, Investments Committee, Board of Auditors, Committee on Contributions, and Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions**. No women were appointed. After elections, the representative of Norway pointed out that women were severely underrepresented in those ballots. Good governance required the participation of women on an equal footing to men, he said. Norway encouraged all States to present women for future appointments and elections.

Women in government

Rwanda leads world ranking of women in parliament

Results of its National Assembly and Senate elections have placed Rwanda at the top of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) world ranking of women in national parliaments. With women now comprising 48.8 per cent of the National Assembly of Rwanda, the country has come the closest to reaching parity between men and women of any national parliament, and replaces the long-time champion, Sweden, where women comprise 45 per cent of the national parliament. Taking into account recent elections, the world average of women's participation in politics is now 15.2 per cent.

Rwanda's new Constitution has a quota of 24 seats reserved for women in the National Assembly. In addition, 15 women were elected to non-reserved seats, making a total of 39 women elected to the Lower House. As for the Senate, the constitutional quota of 30 per cent was reached, with six women elected out of 20 members.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union, with the United Nations Development Programme as its partner, supported the reconstruction of Rwanda, placing particular emphasis on the role of women in parliaments. In 2001, a seminar was held to consider ways of ensuring that the new Rwandan Constitution would be gender-sensitive.

It will be interesting to see what the entry of so many women in the National Assembly will do for politics in Rwanda. Whether this change at the decision-making level will translate into a change in the more traditional societal expectations of women remains to be seen (www.ipu.org).

Congratulations to ...

United Nations family

- **H.E. Ambassador Marjatta Rasi** (Finland), on her election as President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for 2004, thus becoming the first woman ever to head the 54-member development coordinating body;

- **The Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET)** was one of several recipients of the United Nations Human Rights Prize for 2003 by the United Nations General Assembly, in recognition of its outstanding achievement in human rights. The 2003 Prize was presented at the United Nations on 10 December 2003, as part of the annual commemoration of International Human Rights Day. MARWOPNET is a joint peace initiative by the women of the Mano River region (Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea), who combined forces of the diverse networks already operating in the region to ensure the successful implementation of a new platform for action. Its founders share the conviction that women can contribute meaningfully to the quest for regional peace and security, and that the lasting absence of conflict is a necessary condition for fulfilling the human rights of all.
- The United Nations Human Rights Prize for 2003 was also awarded to **Ms. Enriqueta Estela Barnes de Carlotto** of Argentina, an advocate for the disappeared. These prizes are awarded every five years for outstanding promotion and protection of civil liberties and fundamental freedoms.
- Former Minister of Economy **Mr. José Luis Machinea** (Argentina) was appointed **Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)** on 30 October 2003. Mr. Machinea has had a long and distinguished career in both the private and public sectors. He replaced Mr. José Antonio Ocampo, presently Under-Secretary-General for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed four ad litem judges to the **International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)**, three of whom are women: **Ms. Salomy Balungi Bossa** (Uganda); **Ms. Flavia Lattanzi** (Italy) and **Ms. Florence Rita Arrey** (Cameroon). These judges are part of a pool of 18 ad litem judges which enable the Tribunal to expedite its work;
- **Ms. Mary Jane Peters (USA)**, **Mary Jane Peters** who was appointed, effective January 2004, Secretary of the High-Level Committee on Management, United Nations System's Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), formerly the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) and Director of the CEB Secretariat's office in Geneva, becoming the first woman to hold this vital position since the creation of the CEB. Ms. Peters will bring to the Committee her extensive experience in the fields of management and human resources, as well as an insider's knowledge of the workings of the UN system.



- **network** congratulates **Ms. Catherine Bertini**, Under-Secretary-General for Management, United Nations, for receiving the 2003 annual \$250,000 World Food Prize, in recognition of her excellent tenure as Executive Director of the World Food Programme.

The Administrator and colleagues of UNDP will be pleased with awards given to two women UNDP Resident Representatives:

- **Ms. Olubanke King-Akerele** (Liberia), UNDP Resident Representative in Lusaka, Zambia (November 1998–September 2003), who was awarded on 24 October 2003 the Order of Distinguished Service Second Divisions, which is conferred by the Zambian Government upon Zambians and foreigners who have performed long or distinguished service to the Republic of Zambia;
- **Ms. Soknan Han Jung** (Republic of Korea), UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Romania, who received the distinguished award of “Man of the Year” (so far there is no “Person of the Year” award). Ms. Han Jung was also recently promoted to the D-1 level.

Other noteworthy women

- **Ms. Beatrice Mtetwa**, a Zimbabwean lawyer, who was named Human Rights Lawyer of the Year in London on 10 December 2003. Judges at the ceremony paid tribute to her courage in fighting for human rights and press freedom;
- **H.E. Ms. Yolande Bike**, Ambassador of Gabon to the United Nations in Geneva and Vienna, who recently received the Legion d'Honneur, awarded by the Government of France for distinguished service;
- **Ms. Teresa Gouveia** (Portugal), who was named Portugal's first woman Foreign Minister on 8 October 2003, replacing Mr. Antonio Martins da Cruz.

Welcome to these distinguished women Ambassadors (there are now nine women Ambassadors accredited to the United Nations in New York as of January 2004) . . .

- **H.E. Mrs. Laxanachantorn Laohaphan**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Thailand to the UN;
- **H.E. Ms. Nabeela Abdulla Al-Mulla**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the State of Kuwait to the UN.

network welcomes these distinguished women to the group of senior-level women at the United Nations:

- **Ms. Monique Barbut** (France) was appointed on 18 December 2003 as Director, Division of Technology, Industry and Economics in the United Nations Environment Programme.

- **Ms. Cristina Boelcke** (Argentina) was appointed on 18 December 2003 as Director, Division of Regional Cooperation and Representation in the United Nations Environment Programme.
- **Ms. Sandra Haji-Ahmed** (Trinidad and Tobago) was appointed on 18 December 2003 as Director, Operational Services Division, Office of Human Resources Management in the Department of Management.
- **Ms. Jessie Mabutas** (Philippines) was appointed on 18 December 2003 as Director, Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management in the Department of Management.

Women in the news . . .

- A panel of five Islamic judges voted 4 to 1 on 25 September 2003 to overturn the sentence of death for adultery of **Ms. Amina Lawal** (Nigeria). Women's and human rights groups condemned her sentence as a violation of international treaties against torture, which Nigeria signed and to which it is a party.

Shirin Ebadi receives Nobel Peace Prize 2003

Ms. Shirin Ebadi, in accepting the Nobel Peace Prize on 10 December 2003, said that her selection would make women in Iran and throughout the region believe more in themselves, and that to disregard women was tantamount to depriving the entire population in every society of half its capability. The patriarchal culture and the discrimination against women, particularly in the Islamic countries, could not continue. She noted that the discriminatory plight of women in Islamic States, whether in the sphere of civil law or in the realm of social, political and cultural justice, had its roots in the male-dominated culture prevailing in these societies—not in Islam. This patriarchal culture does not tolerate freedom and democracy or equal rights of men and women, because it would threaten the traditional position of the rulers of that culture.

The award, given to her as the first Iranian and the first woman from a Muslim country, would inspire millions of Iranians and nationals of Islamic States with the hope that their efforts and struggles towards the realization of human rights and the establishment of democracy in their respective countries would enjoy the support of international civil society. The prize belonged to the people of Iran, of the Islamic States and of the South.

In closing, Ms. Ebadi said that if the twenty-first century wished to free itself from the cycle of violence, and to avoid a repetition of the disasters of the twentieth century, there would be no other way except through understanding and the putting into practice of every human right for all of humanity—irrespective of race, gender, faith, nationality or social status.

Around the UN . . .

- The General Assembly adopted resolution **58/144** on the improvement of the status of women in the UN system, which was adopted on 22 December 2003 without a vote.
- In resolution **58/185**, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to conduct an in-depth study on all forms and manifestations of violence against women as identified in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The Division for the Advancement of Women will lead the preparation of this study of the Secretary-General. This will be the first such comprehensive study, and will cover three aspects: a statistical overview on all forms of violence against women, with an identification of gaps in data collection; an assessment of the causes of violence against women and of the medium- and long-term consequences of violence against women; and the health, social and economic costs of violence against women. The study will also identify best practice examples in areas such as legislation, policies, programmes and effective remedies.
- **Secretary-General Kofi Annan**, on 4 November 2003, appointed a 16-person blue-ribbon High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change to look into new global security threats and reform of the international system, which he first announced in his speech to the General Assembly in September 2003. The Secretary-General said the Panel is “tasked with examining the major threats and challenges the world faces in the broad field of peace and security, including economic and social issues insofar as they relate to peace and security, and making recommendations for the elements of a collective response”. **Former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun** of Thailand will chair the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. Four women are among the other 15 members of the Panel, including: **former Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland** of Norway and former Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO); **Ms. Mary Chinery-Hesse** of Ghana, Vice-Chair of the National Development Planning Commission and former Deputy Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO); **Ms. Sadako Ogata** of Japan, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees; and **Ms. Nafis Sadik** of Pakistan, former Executive Director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).
- On the occasion of the **International Day for the Abolition of Slavery**, celebrated on 2 December 2003, **Secretary-General Kofi Annan** appealed to States to ratify and implement the two optional protocols to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Air

and Sea. He said that slavery and trafficking, and related practices such as debt bondage, forced prostitution and forced labour, are violations of the most fundamental human rights.

- **Mr. Jan Egeland**, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, briefed the Security Council at an open meeting on 9 December 2003 on the issue of protecting civilians in armed conflict. He said that the UN system has the tools, the technical expertise and the logistical capacity to provide faster and better humanitarian relief to civilians caught in armed conflict, but that the world's political, military and economic leaders still do not make humanitarian principles a reality. He further pointed out 10 areas for action, including ensuring the special protection of women.
- **Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury**, the UN High Representative for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) told the General Assembly, on 9 October 2003, that microcredit programmes are the most effective way to aid in development, particularly for impoverished women. He urged Member States to contribute to the funds that supply the money that backs the loans. Microcredit programmes effectively mobilize savings and deliver financial services to the poor, including small-holders and the self-employed—particularly women. Microcredit is foreign aid that works.
- The World Summit on the Information Society, which was held from 10 to 12 December 2003 in Geneva, adopted a Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action. The Declaration of Principles affirms the importance of women's full participation in the Information Society.

“We affirm that development of ICT provides enormous promise for women, who should be an integral part of, and key actors in, the Information Society. We are committed to ensuring that the Information Society enables women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes. To this end, we should mainstream a gender equality perspective and use ICT as a tool to that end.” (Declaration of Principles, para. 14; www.genderwsis.org)

In your interest . . . policy matters

The **Executive Heads** of all organizations of the United Nations system affirmed in a CEB statement in October 2003 their commitment to inter-agency mobility and to ensuring that policies and monitoring mechanisms are developed and implemented in the context of their human resources management strategies. (Please visit <http://ceb.unsystem.org/hlcm/default.htm>)

Legal breakthrough for women in Mozambique

Dear Friends,

I wish to share with you a great victory achieved today, 9 December 2003, by the feminist and women's movements of Mozambique: the adoption of a new Family Law that modifies the Civil Code. What do we gain in this historical benchmark for Mozambican women? Our gains will be the following:

- The legal role of the man as head of family was eliminated. Now, each partner of a married couple can represent the “sacred” family.
- The legal age for marriage is now 18 years for both sexes. Previously, the age was 16 for women and 18 for men.
- The article stating that the husband was to determine the place of residence was eliminated.
- Traditional and religious marriages were recognized, provided that these marriages were registered and that they preserved the principles established for civil marriage.
- Polygamist unions that are practised in the country (but with an increasing number of multiple and diverse interpretations) were not included in the law.
- In relation to “de facto” marriages, it is established that one year of cohabitation enables the property-sharing by the members of the couple according to the norms established in the Civil Code.
- The right of the wife was established to develop commercial undertakings on her own.

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In your interest . . . reports

- The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** stated in a report entitled “**Women seafarers: global employment policies and practices**” that women seafarers, found mainly on cruise ships, are a small but growing percentage of employees on water-borne transportation fleets, but they are discriminated against and sexually harassed, and many employers and trade unions appear not to have made specific provisions relating to the employment and conditions of work for women. The study highlighted a need for policies to deal with sexual harassment, pregnancy, maternity and reproductive and general health.
- The new study “**Maternal mortality in 2000: Estimates developed by WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA**” reports that African women are 175 times more likely to die in childbirth than women in developed countries, and that a woman living in sub-Saharan Africa has a one in 16 chance of dying in pregnancy or childbirth. Of the estimated 529,000 maternal deaths in 2000, 95 per cent took place in Africa and Asia, 4 per cent in Latin America, and less than 1 per cent in the more developed regions.
- The “**Arab Human Development Report 2003**”, written by Arab experts and academics, highlights that the restrictions to women's empowerment, freedom of expression and access to knowledge present serious challenges facing the Arab region. The report that covers 22 Arab countries said that knowledge could help the Middle East expand human freedoms and become a powerful driver of economic growth through higher productivity. But unreconstructed attitudes to women are restricting economic growth in the Middle East, and few countries can raise the standard of living and improve the well-being of its people without the participation of half its population (<http://www.undp.org/rbas/ahdr/>).
- On 11 December 2003, **UNICEF** launched the report “**The state of the world's children 2004**”. The report identifies girls' education as one of the most crucial issues facing the international development community. The report is a call to action on behalf of the millions of children who are not in school around the world, most of whom are girls. The report argues that the theories, policies and practices of development have been marked by gender discrimination and that the standard approach to development has focused on economic growth rather than human welfare. Through the report UNICEF calls on every nation engaged in development to make the education of all children—with an emphasis on girls—a major focus of investment.
- A report released by the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, “**Monitoring cardiovascular disease**”, in October 2003 said that women surpass men in heart disease death. The study took place in 21 countries and aims

to draw urgent attention to the fact that cardiovascular disease is not just a men's health problem. Women should be encouraged to keep their hearts healthy; they need to eat smart, quit smoking and move for health.

- **UNFPA** launched the “**United Nations Annual State of the World Population Report for 2003**” in London, on 9 October 2003. Dr. Thoraya Obaid, head of UNFPA, called on governments to recognize the scale of the crisis facing young people (between ages 10 and 19) who have reached a peak at 1.2 billion, or nearly a fifth of the total world population. The largest young generation in history faces unprecedented dangers from HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, early marriage and pregnancy, broken homes, drug use, violence and sex slavery. Some highlights of the report are:

Poverty: 238 million young people currently survive on less than a dollar a day, which is the UN definition of extreme poverty.

Education: There are 153 million young people who cannot read or write, two thirds of them female.

Health: HIV/AIDS has already produced 13 million orphans under the age of 15, and AIDS has become a disease of young people; half of all new HIV infections occur among young people from ages 15 to 24. An estimated 6,000 adolescents a day become infected—one every 14 seconds—the majority of them young women.

Pregnancy: Up to half of all pregnancies are unintended.

Homelessness: There may be as many as 100 million teenagers living outside family protection (www.unfpa.org).

Women, peace and security

- The **Security Council** held an open meeting on women, peace and security on 29 October 2003, three years after the Council adopted **resolution 1325**, which recognized that women and girls both bear the brunt of armed conflict and are integral to any lasting solution. In his presentation to the Security Council, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Marie Guéhenno said that when a UN peacekeeping operation is set up in a

volatile environment, the UN has learned to listen to the voices of women and girls, as it is the only way to foster an equitable peace, and recognized the enormous, positive impact that women can have when their knowledge, skills and motivation are harnessed in the name of peace and rebuilding a country. Mr. Guéhenno also urged Member States to provide more female civilian police and military personnel to peacekeeping operations, and called for the inclusion of women and men with experience in gender-based crimes to help the UN address the high rates of violence against women that are common in post-conflict situations.

- **Panel discussion entitled “Impact of 1325—reality or fiction?”:** The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the Inter-Agency Task Force on Women, Peace and Security hosted a panel discussion on the third anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 on 31 October. The panellists were: H.E. Ms. Ruth Sando Perry, former Interim Head of State and Chair of the Council of State of Liberia in 1996-1997, and the founder of Peace Now, Peace for Liberia and the Perry Centre; H.E. Ambassador John Negroponte, United States Ambassador to the UN; Mr. Guliameni Kalomoh, Assistant Secretary-General in charge of Africa and the Security Council Division, DPA; Ms. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director of UNIFEM; Ms. Amy Smythe, Senior Gender Adviser to the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC); and Mr. Jean-Marie Guéhenno, USG for Peacekeeping Operations. Panellists examined progress made in efforts to integrate women more fully into the planning and execution of peacekeeping operations, as well as during disarmament, demobilization, reconciliation and reconstruction. Consensus was reached that progress had been made towards implementation of resolution 1325, but that much more needed to be done.

Speakers noted the need for more women to serve as peacekeepers, military observers and civilian police, and highlighted the responsibilities of national Governments to identify and nominate women for these critical duties. At the same time, the UN Secretariat’s role to assign women to senior positions, including Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) and Deputy SRSGs, was emphasized. In this regard, Member States were urged to recommend qualified women as candidates for these senior posts.

Acknowledging the important role played by full-time gender advisers in the field, speakers called for filling gender adviser posts in DPKO missions, not on an interim but on a permanent basis, and possibly extending such posts to all peacekeeping missions. The importance of gender training for UN peacekeeping personnel, in particular pre-deployment briefing on gender awareness, was highlighted.

Rut Diamint



Interview with Ms. Rut Diamint

Adviser to the Ministry of Defence in Buenos Aires, Argentina

Ms. Rut Diamint is currently professor of International Security at Torcuato Di Tella University (UTDT). For 17 years she was a professor at the University of Buenos Aires. From 1996 to 2000, she coordinated the project “The Civil-Military Issue in Latin America: Training a Civil Network of Specialists” at UTDT, supported by the Ford Foundation. Ms. Diamint is researcher of the “Program Creating Communities in the Americas”, coordinated by the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, Washington, D.C. She was a visiting professor at Columbia University, and received scholarships from Fulbright, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the PIF programme of the Canadian Government and the Tinker Foundation. She edited, all in Spanish, *Argentina and International Security* (1998); *Civilian Control and Armed Forces in the New Latin American Democracies* (1999); and *NATO and MERCOSUR Challenges: Security Communities and Democratic Stability* (2001). Her latest book is *Democracy and Security in Latin America*, published in 2002. She lives in Buenos Aires with her three children.

1. Can you explain to our readers your professional and educational background? And in what capacity are you advising the Ministry of Defence?

I am a graduate in sociology from the University of Buenos Aires. I obtained my master’s degree at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences. At the moment, I am completing a PhD in war studies at Kings College of London University. To start a PhD this late in life is something which

makes little sense in developed countries, but which happens to be normal for women in developing countries, where professional education is not a priority in the life of a married woman with children.

In 1983, democracy was established once again in Argentina. In spite of the positive expectations, the regime was weak, especially because most of the corporations (military, trade unions and business) continued having excess power. In 1985, the first military uprising took place, placing, once again, a threat to our democracy. It was then that I decided to dedicate myself to military affairs.

During these 18 years, I gained experience in dealing with civil-military relationships, as well as on topics of regional and international security. It is on account of my knowledge in these two topics that the present Minister of Defence, Dr. José Pampuro, appointed me last September as adviser on matters regarding regional security and strengthening the institutional make-up of the Ministry of Defence.

2. In your view and experience as a professor, what are the particular issues that career women are facing today and how would you like to see them addressed?

In most third-world countries, it is not common to find many women in my field of expertise. However, it would only be fair to say that it is a recent development for expert civilians, whether men or women, to be called upon to speak about issues that were always exclusive to military people and their allies.

In contrast to some African countries, women in most Latin American countries have not participated actively in mainstreaming gender issues into their career development. In some African and Asian countries, women have been instrumental in advancing the cause of peace. Hence, in the case of Guatemala, Ms. Rigoberta Menchu, an indigenous leader, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In Argentina, the leading opposition to military dictatorship was spearheaded by the well-known “Madres de Plaza de Mayo” (mothers of Plaza de Mayo) and the “Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo” (grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo), which demanded that the military government bring back their husbands, sons, daughters and grandchildren.

However, at present there is no gender mainstreaming or school of thought that incorporates the needs of women. Particularly for those of us who continue to hold two simultaneous jobs—that of mothers and wives—there are no professional governmental services to assist the working woman with children, and there are few public schools with a full-day schedule to match the working hours of the parents. What has really sustained the working woman so far has been the solidarity afforded by family and neighbours.

I teach at Torcuato Di Tella University, a small and prestigious university, where all the professors teach and perform research. The Department of Political Science and International Studies does not have a special orientation in security studies, which is my field. That means that students

have the chance, but also the disadvantage, of taking only one course on International Security and Civilian-military relations. These two subjects are not always combined in the same syllabus, but, for Latin America, most security problems are related to the democratic control of the armed forces.

3. As a woman working in a field populated mostly by men, what were the most important decisions you had to make to fit into the ministerial/corporate, mostly masculine culture? What decisions did you make in order to gain respect from male colleagues?

In my case, in addition to the mistrust that military personnel usually have for sociologists in general, I also happen to be a woman. To sum up, my colleagues did not even trust my ability to distinguish between a rifle and a shotgun. They were right, I cannot tell the difference; but I have been able to show them that to be able to speak about defence policies and security, it is not as paramount to know about weapons. The most important need was to have substantial knowledge of politics and policies in this field.

I must confess, however, that in order to break the ice with my male colleagues, I always ask members of this military corporation about their family concerns. I strongly believe that this question is an “ice-breaker” and provides a basis for better interpersonal relations, while it also helps to overcome traditional Argentinean “machismo”.

4. In your career, did you experience a glass ceiling, and if so, how did you manage to overcome it? Can you illustrate with examples and suggestions for junior Professionals.

I never try to show off my academic and substantial knowledge to my military colleagues, at least not initially. But I made sure that I proved to them, a bit later, that I was very much in control of topics at stake. I strongly believe that professional seriousness and commitment is well respected even by those colleagues who do not appreciate women becoming part of their work environment. I do not have any problems playing by the rules (for instance, wearing skirts instead of pants to go to a military or ministerial meeting). This acceptance of the rules does not diminish the role I play, change my ideas or influence how I discharge the responsibilities of my job; it is simply more convenient and less problematic. I also try not to argue about issues that are not essential to my work.

5. How do women in leadership positions make a difference in society in general, and in the working environment in particular? What advice would you give to young women?

From my perspective and despite what everyone says, I believe that women are better negotiators than men, which is a benefit. From my own experience, women are also very committed to their jobs, although, at times, less creative than men due to their insecurities. Without any doubt, they are more organized, which is essential for academic work. And these

attributes are definitely a good formula for being very good at your job! And finally, I would like to humbly suggest the following to my young colleagues: ask about issues you do not understand or don't know about; learn from those who have more knowledge than you; and never assume you know more than others.

6. Do you think that awareness and mainstreaming of gender issues has increased or permeated all or any levels of Argentine government policy and culture? If not, what initiatives would you recommend to break down the chauvinist culture? Can you illustrate with some examples.

Argentina maintains by far a high level of chauvinistic attitudes, but it is important to state that, lately, women have been nominated to high-level positions. We now have women ministers, congresswomen, senators, leaders of parties and women in the diplomatic arena who have performed their jobs in an outstanding manner, not because they are women but because they are excellent professionals. For the first time, a woman was recently nominated for the Supreme Court of Justice. Still, there are noticeable gaps. However, I am not aware of any woman who is a hospital director or a dean of a college or university. This leads us to discussions on affirmative action, such as the importance of increasing the number of women in the workforce to balance it out and to avoid the discrimination that was suffered in the past. I think that in Latin American societies, there were never as many women in higher-level positions as men. When this happens, it is very common to happen at the expense of their roles as mothers and wives. It is very important to note that most women progress rapidly in their professions after they get divorced. What I am suggesting here is that husbands generally curtail the professional development of women.

7. In your experience, do you believe that efforts undertaken by the United Nations to sensitize Governments on the plight of women in war has brought results; and has Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security become, in your judgement, an integral part of resolving present conflict situations?

I think that, historically, women have always preferred peace, at least in the past, when wars were a "men's affair". Yet, the role of women in the armed forces and/or guerrilla movements is similar to that of men. However, during internal conflicts and civil, ethnic and religious wars, civilian women suffer terrible consequences due to these conflicts. The humanitarian laws of war are not respected and, therefore, women and their families are constantly threatened with violence. From this perspective, a woman's voice is extremely important as a promoter of peace from a humanitarian point of view.

This women's focus becomes more important since people's welfare is a concern in the security realm. There it was argued that global security must be broadened from its tradi-

tional focus on the security of States to include the security of people and the planet. The UN "Human Development Report 1994" included human security as a concept that allows fighting against chronic threats, such as hunger, disease and repression. In most Latin American societies, the repression by the military has given place to police repression. Women still have much to achieve in order that security and defence become a public policy and not a sectarian interest.

During peaceful times, it is my belief that Governments should include more women in defence and security decision-making, not solely from a gender perspective but because it is a matter of democracy, tolerance, diversity and inclusion. For those countries that have adhered to international conventions and signed protocols protecting the rights of women, the United Nations has a central role in ensuring the monitoring of those laws and fundamental freedoms, including putting sanctions on those nations who violate their laws.

8. As an executive woman, did you feel in the past that you had to make some difficult personal choices to pursue a successful working career?

Tough choices? Of course, there are always choices to make and their gravity depends on the person making them. In my case, I am forced to go on business trips at least seven times a year, and this has complicated the lives of my children. Personally, what annoys me the most is to have to go to a conference on the birthday of one of my three children.

9. Finally, how would you summarize your career? What would you like to achieve both in your professional and personal life? What has helped you the most to achieve success?

I tremendously enjoy my career, and I love challenges and achieving goals. Sometimes I get upset with myself, because dedicating myself so much to my career has forced me to put aside other things that I love, such as music. However, it is not possible to do things half way, because we live in a very competitive world. I would like to be able to manage my time better, but I am always running around trying to complete a pending document or a presentation that I prepared the night before.

In my career, I always found people who helped me very much: people that I took as role models, who are good examples and also very good friends. But I am sure that I was appointed to different jobs because of my responsible and professional attitudes. If as now, I need to work with another country, to negotiate, for instance, a border conflict, my Government must be sure that I will respond with knowledge and seriousness.

In my experience, it is not necessary to be a genius but rather to deliver one's job, and to be steady and reliable. The success of a job generally depends on teamwork, and I always like to be there for my colleagues and friends.

ITU Regional Symposium on Women in Technology



News from the field ...

ESCWA Centre for Women

The ESCWA (UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) Centre for Women was established in 2003 by resolution 240 (XXII) of the twenty-second session of the Commission. It aims to improve the status of women by empowering them economically, socially and politically. The Centre is instrumental in providing technical assistance to several member States in building national capacities for producing gender-disaggregated statistics; sharpening skills to meet the reporting requirements of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; forging synergy with NGOs; providing networking and lobbying skills; assisting in alleviating poverty of rural women through microfinance facilities and the use of pro-poor technologies; and mainstreaming a gender perspective into policies, projects and programmes.

ITU Regional Symposium on Women in Technology

Under the auspices of the First Lady of Egypt, **Ms. Suzanne Mubarak**, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and the National Telecommunication Institute of Egypt organized a regional symposium on “Women and Information and Communication Technology” from 17 to 19 December 2003. The Symposium, held in Cairo, was organized in collaboration with **ESCWA**, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the General Knowledge Partnership. The Symposium focused on current issues on gender and the information and communication technology (ICT) in the Arab region; awareness-building on ICT and gender; policies and strategies to increase women's access to ICT; the importance of partner-

ships; capacity-building activities for women in ICT; highlighting the best practices in the Arab region; and highlighting the gender dimension in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the second phase of the WSIS to be held in Tunisia in 2005.

The **Office of Gender Affairs** of the **United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)** has carried out consultations within UNMIK Civil Administration/Pillar II, involving Principal International Officers assigned to ministries, Reserved Area Directors, Regional Representatives and Municipal Representatives in the debate on the **draft law on gender equality in Kosovo**, prepared by the Gender Equality Committee of the Kosovo Assembly and UNMIK.

Once approved, this law would establish the gender-equality principle as a fundamental value for the institutionalization of the democratic system in Kosovo, including a wide range of strategic provisions in the political, social, economic, educational and health fields. The Office of Gender Affairs has been supporting the Gender Equality Committee in conceptualizing and drafting the above-mentioned law and is proud of having engaged in the process not only by providing technical assistance, but by ensuring the implementation of the UN mandate in mainstreaming a gender perspective in peacekeeping missions.

News flash ...

- The number of women holding board seats in **Fortune 500** companies is rising slowly. Women held 13.6 per cent of corporate director seats in 2003, up from 12.4 per cent in 2001. Currently, women hold 779 board seats. The number of women board directors has increased at an annual average rate of 4.1 per cent from 1995 to 2003. If the same growth continues, it is expected that women will comprise a quarter of all **Fortune 500** company boardrooms in 20 years. The search for more qualified outside candidates will give more women a chance to serve on boards. Women make up 46.5 per cent of the U.S. workforce, and held more than 50 per cent of managerial and professional specialty positions last year, according to a recent study entitled “2003 Catalyst Census of Women Board of Directors of the Fortune 500”, published by Catalyst (U.S.A.) in December 2003 (http://www.catalystwomen.org/press_room/press_releases/WBD_03_PR.pdf).
- **A gene linked to osteoporosis** has been identified by Decode Genetics, the Icelandic company that is leading efforts to find the genes that underlie common human

diseases. A test for the variant forms of the gene is being developed by Roche diagnostics and will be available at the beginning of 2004, said Dr. Kari Stefansson, Chief Executive of Decode Genetics. The test needs to be taken only once, and if a gene variant were to be found, a high-calcium diet and plenty of exercise would be prescribed.

- Slowly, but effectively, the **Internet is empowering women in Africa** to follow political and social events as they have never before witnessed. Women in Somalia learned of political developments via the Horn of Africa Regional Women's Knowledge Network (HAWKNET) on the Web, and then passed on their knowledge through their communities. Another similar initiative was the Women's Net Pilot Project in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, which has also involved women in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

Web sites

<http://www.womenwarpeace.org>: This web portal of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) aims to be a centralized repository of information on the impact of armed conflict on women, and the role of women in peace-building. The portal offers gender profiles of conflict countries, briefs on issues that affect women and girls just before, during and after conflict, and information on UN gender programming in conflict zones.

<http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/>: Gender Equality and Humanitarian Assistance: A Guide to the Issues.

<http://www.iaea.org/women/2003/>: International Atomic Energy Agency.

<http://www.unidir.org/gender> (English) and

http://www.unidir.org/gender_fr (French): Newsletter, Issue 4, 2003, entitled Women, Men, Peace and Security.

www.womenwagingpeace.com: Advocates for the full participation of women in formal and informal peace processes around the world. Reports have been prepared on conflict prevention and non-violent transformation; conflict resolution: pre-negotiation and negotiations; post-conflict reconstruction: disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and security reform and post-conflict reconstruction: governance and political participation and post-conflict reconstruction: transitional justice and reconciliation.

<http://www.icsc.un.org>: The International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) is an independent expert body established by the UN General Assembly. Its mandate is to regulate and coordinate the conditions of service of staff in the UN common system, while promoting and maintaining high standards in the international civil service.

<http://www.un.org/jab>: The Secretariat of the Joint Appeals Board (JAB) at Headquarters is pleased to announce the launching of its web site. Visitors may access information about the appeals procedure and find answers to some most frequently asked questions. Appellants may view the status of their cases and the estimated time for the start of their review. The information will be updated periodically.

You can read all of **network** online at
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/jp.htm>

You can find a monthly list of senior-level vacancy announcements (P-5 and above) at
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/news/vacancies/>



United Nations, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women

How to get a job at the United Nations

Eligible women are urged to apply

The United Nations recruits qualified individuals in the following occupational groups:

- * Administration
- * Electronic data processing
- * Language and related work
- * Legal and related work
- * Social development
- * Economics
- * Finance
- * Library
- * Public information
- * Statistics

For junior Professionals, recruitment takes place through national competitive examinations; for language and related work, recruitment takes place through language examinations. For information on national and competitive examinations, please visit the following web site: <http://www.un.org/Depts/OHRM/examin/exam.htm>

For middle and higher-level Professional posts, recruitment takes place through a competitive system of applications (described below). The Secretary-General is committed to the achievement of gender balance at all levels.

In addition to United Nations Headquarters in New York, the UN Secretariat has offices around the world, including: Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beirut, Geneva, Nairobi, Santiago and Vienna. The International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda are located at The Hague, Netherlands, and in Arusha, Tanzania.

UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT

To review the listings of available posts, please visit the United Nations web site at UN Human Resources “Galaxy” e-Staffing System at: <https://jobs.un.org/release1/vacancy/vacancy.asp>

The system provides instructions on application procedures. Please follow them.

Online applications are strongly encouraged to enable the UN to place your resume into a permanent database. It is most important that you observe the deadlines for applications.

Should you not have access to Internet facilities, you can also contact the Staffing Support Section, Operational Services Division, United Nations, Office of Human Resources Management, Room S-2475, New York, NY 10017, USA, for further information.

The site is also accessible through UN Intranet for staff members. For further information, go to the UN Intranet *Quicklinks/staff selection*. For frequently asked questions, and answers, click on *FAQ*.

For general inquiries or technical support on applying online, please contact estaffing@un.org

PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS

Posts in UN peacekeeping missions are also listed on the “Galaxy” system. **Online applications are encouraged.** Should you not have access to Internet facilities, you may apply by sending your detailed resume to DPKO, Personnel Management and Support Service, Human Resources Planning and Development Section, One UN Plaza, DC1-0980, United Nations, P.O. Box 20, New York, NY 10017, USA. Listings of vacancy announcements and forms are available at UN offices worldwide. In general, positions are offered in the following fields: civil engineering, election monitoring, electronic data processing, civil and judicial administration, human rights, humanitarian assistance, gender, legal affairs, logistics, political affairs, procurement and public information.

UN COMMON SYSTEM

To find out more information on vacancies in the UN common system, please visit the following web sites for instructions on how to apply:

- * www.un.org/womenwatch/news/vacancies/
- * www.undp.org
- * www.unfpa.org
- * www.fao.org
- * www.ilo.org
- * www.unicef.org
- * www.who.org
- * www.wfp.org

For more information on the status of women in the Secretariat, please contact the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women/Focal Point for Women, Ms. Sylvia Hordosch at (212) 963-5450; fax (212) 963-9545; e-mail: hordosch@un.org and/or dain@un.org; address: Office of the Focal Point for Women, Two UN Plaza, Room DC2-1290, New York, NY 10017, USA.

A letter from one of our readers

E-mail received on 10 December 2003, 10:15 a.m.

Subject: Help for working mothers

I was very interested in reading the UN Women's Newsletter, but was surprised not to see any action taken towards helping young mothers in their day-to-day struggles. Indeed I see lots of new mothers, like myself, under much stress, as they have to bring their babies or young children—who are not yet going to school—to a nursery or crèche, which is very often far from home or work. We are being advised to book in advance, as the waiting lists are usually one-and-a-half to two years full. Sometimes, men will help—but rarely—and in other cases, single mothers have to struggle by themselves. Furthermore, if you cannot get a crèche that is subsidized, you will have to go to a private one, which is quite expensive; and once you have a second child, what choice do you have left? Unless you have a pretty good salary, it becomes almost more expensive to work rather than to stay at home and look after your children. How can we reach a 50/50 gender parity? Sometimes, it looks like we have to pay the price for working by having to forget about being a woman and a mother. When you request permission

to work a flex-time schedule (80 or 50 per cent), you are usually encouraged to look for another job, or given a negative answer with all sort of excuses. This is not a choice!

One simple solution would be to create a nursery/crèche in the UN building. Working women would then not have to be rushing to the crèche every evening. Then bosses would stop making remarks or putting pressure on us when we absolutely cannot stay beyond a certain time, as the crèche would be closed. It would also allow women to breastfeed their babies without having to go home. Another option would be to allow staff members, who wish to do so, to work at 50 per cent (the 80 per cent now being almost possible with a flex-time schedule).

All women know that it is hard to work and raise children. If we want to reach a 50/50 gender parity at all levels, we have to give women both the means and the choices to achieve that goal.

Sylvie Paul-Herbinière
United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund, UNOG

Dear Readers . . . If there is any manager—female or male—that you would like to recognize as somebody who shares our commitment to improving the status of women in the Secretariat, let us know. We will highlight her/his work in our next issue. If you want to send us your comments about *network*, an article that you wrote etc., we would be delighted to receive it. The more interaction with our readers, the better!!!

You can read all of *network* online at
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/fp.htm>

network—The UN Women's Newsletter

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