

SG calls for urgent action to achieve gender parity at UN

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Unhappy about the "slow" progress made towards achieving gender parity in the United Nations system, Secretary-General BAN Ki-moon has called for redoubling of efforts to reverse the "regrettable trend."

In a report, "[Improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system](#)" (A/63/364) submitted during the General Assembly's 63rd session, the Secretary-General said available data "show clearly that the pace of progress towards the goal of gender parity has been markedly slow, even marginal."

The goal was to have been reached by 2000. However, only 38.4 per cent of staff in the UN system are women, and between 31 December 2004 and 31 December 2007 there was only a 1.5 per cent increase.

In the UN Secretariat, the proportion of women in the professional and higher categories has remained nearly static, with only 0.2 per cent growth in the two years since mid-2006.

"The entire system must more than redouble its efforts through adopting new policies where none exist and more rigorously implement existing ones," urged the Secretary-General in the report. Adding: "Only then can meaningful [advancements] towards gender parity be achieved in the United Nations system."

Despite the "marginal" progress, there has been increased awareness of the issue of achieving gender parity in the UN. That coupled with the knowledge of minimal advances, the report notes, could propel positive change.

[The Secretary-General stressed the responsibility of senior managers to ensure that existing policies are implemented. "Efforts must be made to overcome the United Nations system's informal organizational cultures which constrain the advancement of women staff," he wrote in the new publication, calling for flexible work arrangements.](#)

The report cited some agencies such as the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) and UN Development Programme (**UNDP**) for putting in place "good practice" measures towards achieving gender balance.

UNESCO, for instance, is reported to have laid out measures for reaching 50 per cent representation of women at senior levels by 2015, while UNDP in a recent report recommended affirmative action to attain and sustain the 50/50 parity goal, along with more efficient inter-agency mobility, especially among women in management positions.

According to the Secretary-General's report, UN bodies have reported impediments that fall into seven broad categories, namely: inadequate accountability, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms; the lack of special measures to achieve gender balance; the absence of a focal point system; limited flexible work arrangements; lack of outreach in recruitment; low numbers of qualified women applicants; and lack of adequate data on the causes of high attrition rates for women.

Almost all organizations within the world body face large numbers of retirements in the near future, providing an opportunity to hasten progress towards stepped-up promotions and recruitment of qualified women.