



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

2 August 2007

Excellency,

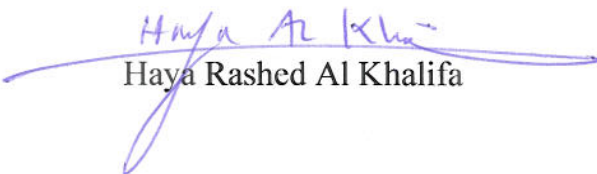
I have the honour to bring to your attention the attached letter from the Deputy Secretary-General including a concept note on the Secretariat's proposal for a strengthened gender equality architecture.

The concept note was prepared at my request following the briefing by the Deputy Secretary-General on June 21 2007, to respond to Members States need for further clarity and additional information on the recommendations of the High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence on gender equality and empowerment of women.

The Co-Chairs will advise you on further steps to carry the consultations forward on this important matter.

I sincerely hope that the information provided in the concept note will enable Member States to have an informed and focused discussion with a view to achieving concrete progress that will strengthen the United Nations' gender equality architecture. I am confident that all Member States will continue to extend their full support to the Co-Chairs in the ensuing consultations.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.


Haya Rashed Al Khalifa

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York



THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

1 August 2007

Excellency,

I herewith transmit a concept note on the Secretariat's proposal for a strengthened gender equality architecture. The note has been prepared in response to your request as contained in your letter dated 29 June 2007.

The note is the result of an intense and lengthy consultative process among the members of the Inter-Agency Gender Task Force which I chair and which includes all relevant United Nations entities. There is consensus among the Task Force members that the existing architecture for gender equality and women's empowerment is fragmented and under-funded and, therefore, inadequate to address effectively General Assembly mandates on gender and women's issues.

The Task Force also agrees on a number of desired goals that a strengthened architecture should aim at, including becoming a much stronger voice on women's issues so that gender equality and women's empowerment are given adequate priority throughout the United Nations system; establishing a stronger partnership with governments and civil society to deliver results, especially at the country level; and ensuring greater coherence among the various assistance efforts. It is the opinion of the Task Force that such goals could be achieved by a strong centralized entity with the authority to ensure that gender is mainstreamed in the work of the United Nations system.

The thrust of the note is in line with the proposal outlined by the Secretary-General in his report on the recommendations of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence (A/61/836) and with my presentation to the Member States on 21 June.

Her Excellency
Haya Rashed Al Khalifa
President of the General Assembly
New York

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It is my hope that Member States will find the note a useful conceptual basis to start discussion and deliberation of the issue. I trust that under your leadership progress can be made to endow the United Nations with an effective architecture for gender equality and women's empowerment. Needless to say, the Secretariat and I stand ready to assist you, Madam President, and the Member States once further guidance is provided to us by the General Assembly.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Asha-Rose Migiro

Concept Note on a Strengthened Architecture for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women

A. Introduction

1. This concept note responds to the General Assembly President's letter dated 29 June 2007 to the Deputy Secretary-General requesting additional information on an improved and more coherent gender equality architecture to support the on-going intergovernmental review of the current UN gender equality architecture. It takes into account intergovernmental mandates on gender equality and women's empowerment, the concerns raised by Member States during the informal consultations on 21 June 2007 and the gaps identified in the current architecture. It also makes a case for a new and strengthened architecture for gender equality and the empowerment of women. The note was prepared in consultation with the Deputy Secretary-General's Inter-Agency Task Force comprised of a number of UN entities.

B. Mandates

2. The mandate for gender equality and women's empowerment is derived from the United Nations Charter which established that the work of the UN should be based on the equal rights of men and women.

3. The United Nations work on gender equality continues to be guided by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, and the 2005 World Summit and other outcomes of UN major conferences and summits. Important mandates on gender equality also emanate from resolutions of the General Assembly, ECOSOC and its functional commissions, in particular the Commission on the Status of Women. These policy documents stipulate that Governments bear the primary responsibility for achieving the goals of gender equality. All entities of the UN system are called upon, within their respective mandates, to facilitate implementation of these policy decisions, including through mainstreaming a gender perspective in their own policies, strategies, budgets and programmes.

4. This policy framework is complemented by normative work on gender equality in human rights under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which sets legally binding obligations for State Parties on women's rights, the elimination of discrimination against women and the achievement of gender equality.

C. The case for a new and strengthened architecture for gender equality and the empowerment of women

5. The current architecture for gender equality and empowerment of women of the UN comprises: the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the International Institute for Research and Training for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), gender units and gender focal points in UN entities (gender mainstreaming), and departmental focal points (for gender balance), and gender theme groups (at the country level).

6. Coordinating mechanisms include the Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and the UNDG Task Team on Gender Equality. The Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and its High-level Committees on Programme and Management (HLCP and HLCM) also play an increasingly important role in interagency coordination of gender related policies at the level of heads of UN entities.

7. However, these incremental attempts at enhancing coordination have led to positive though insufficient results by any measure. There is no single centre of leadership promoting coordination and coherence. The architecture for gender equality and empowerment of women is under-resourced; and there is inadequate institutional capacity for oversight and accountability for system-wide performance on gender equality and women's empowerment and low capacity for gender mainstreaming.

8. At the regional and country levels, the existing gender units and gender focal points within UN entities often overlap, compete for the same resources, and are weakly positioned in the organizational structure. A number of these units have unclear mandates, limited access to decision-making, and few resources and support mechanisms. The Gender Theme Groups of UN Country Teams face challenges of heavy workloads, lack of seniority and expertise on gender equality, frequent changes in membership due to staff turnover as well as lack of access to resources and management support. UNIFEM has presence in 60 countries, yet it is not included in the decision-making of many UN Country Teams and regional directors' teams.

9. In sum, the current architecture is too incoherent, under-resourced and fragmented to provide effective support to Member States and therefore, needs a complete overhaul. This contributes to the gap between implementation at the country level and the global, regional and national policy commitments on gender equality. If Member States are to meet their goals for peace, development, human rights, humanitarian action and gender equality, the capacity of the United Nations system to support them in this area needs to be strengthened to better address the needs of women world-wide and the global challenges they face.

10. This state of affairs led Heads of State and Government to commit to strengthening the capacities of the United Nations system on gender issues and empowerment of women during the 2005 World Summit. This was followed-up by

specific recommendations for change in the report of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence. These recommendations have been supported by statements made by many Member States, including Ministers, at the General Assembly informal thematic debate in March 2007, and considered during the system-wide coherence informal consultations on gender of 21 June 2007. In addition many civil society and women's organizations have strongly advocated for change to the current gender architecture.

D. Purpose and functions of a consolidated entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women

11. The purpose of the reform proposal is to strengthen the UN's provision of coherent, timely, and demand-driven support for the efforts of Member States in strengthening national capacity to achieve gender equality consistent with national priorities and international gender equality norms and policy frameworks.

12. The new architecture would feature a central consolidated entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women, enhanced system-wide coherence, stronger partnerships with Member States and civil society and strengthened inter-agency coordination mechanisms.

13. The new entity would bring together OSAGI, DAW, UNIFEM and INSTRAW and add value to UN work on gender equality and the empowerment of women by (a) giving **much stronger voice** on women's issues to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are given adequate priority throughout the UN system, (b) ensuring that the UN **works more effectively** with governments and civil society in this mission to deliver results, especially at the country level and (c) ensuring **greater coherence** among the various assistance efforts.

14. To achieve these goals the new entity would have principal responsibility for linking system-wide research, policy and country-level catalytic programming and leading effective gender mainstreaming work of the UN system. In particular, it would develop and strengthen system-wide gender expertise; assist the UN system to incorporate gender perspectives into their programmes and policies; act as a catalyst for system-wide initiatives, and carry out targeted country driven technical assistance and targeted programmes, particularly of cross-sectoral nature; and would have the authority to hold senior managers accountable for ensuring that gender equality and women's empowerment are a top priority throughout the United Nations system.

15. For this entity to better address women's needs around the world, in both developed and developing countries, and become a driving force throughout the UN system on women's issues, it must seek to engage Governments and other actors; have strategic presence in regional and sub-regional offices and selected UN Country Teams and work in close cooperation with Gender Advisers in other UN entities.

16. However, the consolidated entity for gender equality and women's empowerment would not replace or duplicate the work of other entities such as, for example, the

specialized agencies, funds and programmes, regional commissions. Each UN entity will be responsible for mainstreaming a gender perspective into its sectoral policies and programmes. The new entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women would contribute to reducing duplication in activities resulting from overlapping inter-governmental mandates. It would support and coordinate gender and women's empowerment activities of UN entities through an enhanced inter-agency coordination machinery to increase system-wide synergies and cooperate closely with them in carrying out holistic programming and gender related cross-sectoral projects.

17. It would work in close cooperation with gender focal points and gender units of UN entities on sectoral and cross-sectoral programmes and projects. In particular, the new gender entity would support UN country teams by clarifying and strengthening linkages between policies and their implementation, facilitating, and operationalizing gender mainstreaming in various areas of UN activities consistent with inter-governmental mandates and policies. At the Headquarters level, it would create opportunities for dialogue between national policy makers, UN country teams and inter-governmental bodies; ensure systematic feedback of field experience in inter-governmental policy-making, monitoring system-wide gender mainstreaming, including at the country level; sharing knowledge on gender equality and developing services, tools and products.

18. Accordingly, the new entity would:

- (a) provide substantive servicing to UN bodies (CSW, ECOSOC, General Assembly and Security Council) where commitments, norms, and policy recommendations on gender equality and gender mainstreaming are discussed and agreed upon;
- (b) monitor the implementation of the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Outcome Document of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000);
- (c) undertake global, regional and national advocacy efforts on issues critical to gender equality and women's empowerment to ensure that emerging, under-recognized and under-resourced issues receive national, regional and global attention;
- (d) undertake new and consolidate existing research and analytical work, to support overall objectives, including acting as a clearing house for knowledge and experience on gender equality and empowerment of women from all parts of the UN system;
- (e) building on comparative advantage of UN actors, lead and coordinate the system's strategies, policies and actions on gender equality and women's empowerment, and promote effective system-wide gender mainstreaming;
- (f) ensure accountability of the UN system, including through oversight, monitoring and reporting of system-wide performance;
- (g) lead innovative and catalytic country-driven programming, gender mainstreaming and capacity-building and provide targeted technical assistance and capacity-building, targeted in line with national priorities; and

- (h) monitor and report on system-wide compliance with intergovernmental mandates on gender balance including at senior level/decision-making levels.

F. Institutional framework

19. The new entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women, based on a hybrid model, would fully integrate normative dimensions (policy, analytical and support to intergovernmental and interagency decision making processes) with demand-driven operational aspects (policy advisory, catalytic and targeted programming services at the country level) using existing delivery mechanisms and experience as appropriate. Intergovernmental decisions and national priorities would serve as basis for design and development of catalytic and targeted programmes which would be effectively delivered on the ground. The new entity would maintain a fund to provide financial support for national and regional efforts for gender equality and empowerment of women.
20. The new entity would have strong institutional capacity to undertake its functions as well as communication, outreach and fund-raising capabilities. This should allow it to take a strategic approach to bridging the gap between the UN's normative and operational work. It should be efficient, cost-effective and flexible in order to assist Member States, whenever and wherever requested; have sufficient financial and human resources; work in partnership with key players, particularly women's NGOs and networks; and focus on activities that have measurable impact on the lives of women worldwide.
21. Country engagement should harness the comparative advantage of existing UN agencies operating in the field to promote national ownership of gender equality and women's empowerment programmes based on national diversity and experience.
22. Inter-agency coordination on gender equality issues would be significantly enhanced as a vehicle for ensuring greater coherence and pooling of resources (technical, analytical and financial) in support of gender equality and women's empowerment as well as an enhanced system-wide monitoring and performance evaluation by the consolidated entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women at the CEB level, and revitalization of the Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality and the UNDG Task Team on Gender Equality.
23. The new entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women should be led by an Executive head at the Under-Secretary-General level, reporting directly to the Secretary-General. The Executive head should participate in decision-making in senior management bodies, including the Chief Executive Board for Coordination, UNDG, the Policy Committee and Executive Committees.
24. The Executive Director would be assisted by a team of senior management of high calibre, with significant expertise and experience on gender equality issues at both global and country levels. The staffing plan for the new entity should achieve a mix of levels and grades to attract staff with both policy and operational experience, ensure

adequate managerial capacity and provide for advancement and mobility opportunities between different areas of work of the entity.

25. The issue of governance of the new entity for gender equality and women's empowerment will require further analysis. However, as an example and subject to guidance and approval to be provided by the General Assembly, intergovernmental guidance and oversight for the catalytic operational activities of the new entity could be provided by the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board or another body, reporting to the General Assembly through ECOSOC as appropriate. The General Assembly should maintain its oversight role over normative aspects of the new entities activities.

G. Funding

26. In order to effectively execute the functions outlined above, the new entity would require sufficient and predictable funding. This would be provided through both assessed and voluntary contributions.

H. Next Steps

27. Should Member States approve the concept of the new hybrid entity, the Secretary-General would formalize the Member States' vision of a new entity for gender equality and women's empowerment by preparing a comprehensive programme budget document, which would include more details and analysis on the governance, structure, funding and staffing of the new entity. These more elaborate proposals would be developed bearing in mind the issues of applicable regulations and rules governing financial, staffing and other related arrangements.