

Introductory Remarks
by
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at the
OECD/DAC/Network on Gender Equality and
Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality

Joint Workshop on Gender and Post-Conflict Reconstruction:
Lessons Learned from Afghanistan

Paris, France 10-11 July 2003

Madam Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Asgeirsdottir
Honourable Minister, Mr. Roeskau
Members of the OECD/DAC Network on Gender Equality and of
the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality,
Colleagues and Friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here to welcome you to the fifth joint workshop of both our Networks. I look forward to a constructive and stimulating debate that will help us increase the effectiveness of our support to post-conflict reconstruction processes through the enhanced integration of gender perspectives in our work.

First, I would like to give special thanks to Ms. Berglind Asgeirsdottir, Deputy Secretary-General, OECD, and her staff for their hospitality in hosting this meeting. I would also like to extend my appreciation for their excellent work to Bea ten Tusscher, Chair of the OECD/DAC Network on Gender Equality, and her bureau, particularly Phil Evans and to its Secretariat. Thanks also to those who have travelled from far away to be here today, especially Minister Sarabi and other Afghan colleagues and our agency colleagues from Afghanistan. Our deep regret that at the last minute our colleague, Mr. Nigel Fisher, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, could not be with us.

Network

I would like to say a few words about the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality. The Network consists of approximately 60 members representing offices and departments of the United Nations (UN) Secretariat, including regional commissions and UN agencies, funds and programmes, and the Bretton Woods Institutions.

The Network's predecessor bodies started in 1975 for the First World Conference on Women in Mexico. Now and especially since the Beijing Conference, the Network

supports gender mainstreaming through the exchange of experience and good practice at the annual and now biennial meetings and through a system of task forces. Through the Network, gender issues are being brought regularly to the attention of the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB) for Coordination, which is chaired by the Secretary-General and its high-level committees.

Afghanistan

The focus of our workshop is gender perspectives in post-conflict Afghanistan and lessons learned. The UN and its family of organizations have had a long interest and presence in Afghanistan. The Security Council has considered the situation in Afghanistan over the years, and more intensely since the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in 1996 and their fall in 2001. The General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and the Commissions on the Status of Women and Human Rights have also scrutinized the question of Afghan women on a continuing basis.

My first personal contact with women in Afghanistan was in 1997, when the Secretary-General asked me to lead an Inter-Agency Gender Mission to Afghanistan. The assistance community at the time, and in the years to follow, faced the challenge of taking a principled approach on the equal participation of women and men as beneficiaries, in assistance programmes in a situation of severe political obstacles and resistance.

Throughout the 20th century, women's status and women's rights have been part of an ongoing struggle between modern and traditional forces, which also played out in tensions between and among rural and urban populations and between ethnic groups. These tensions continue to affect the approach of the UN system and donors in promoting gender equality as a goal of humanitarian assistance and reconstruction efforts.

After the fall of the Taliban, the UN system reacted through a fast moving series of actions. Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi was appointed as Special Representative of the Secretary-General. The United Nations and the German Government hosted peace talks in Bonn, which established an interim administration as a first step toward a broad-based, gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic and fully representative government and pointed to the establishment of the First Ministry of Women's Affairs. At UN headquarters, the first Integrated Mission Task Force (IMTF) was established to advise the Special Representative, and coordinate and prepare strategies for the establishment of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The IMTF included a gender specialist from the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). Gender was integrated into the Mission as one of several cross-cutting themes in both the political and the relief, recovery and reconstruction pillars. However, with the exception of an interim period last year, the post of Senior Gender Adviser has not yet been filled.

Last year, UNAMA and the interim gender adviser set up an Inter-Agency Network for Gender Equality as one mechanism for effective coordination and monitoring. The Network comprises UNAMA and gender focal points from 12 agencies, as well as government representatives and NGOs. UNAMA and the international assistance community worked closely with the Transitional Administration in the planning and

implementation of the National Development Framework and the Transitional Assistance Programme for Afghanistan (TAPA), covering the period January 2003 to March 2004. This Programme made an effort to mainstream gender into all sectors and recognized the need for targeted interventions for women and girls.

The period immediately after the fall of the Taliban led to great optimism and hope. Within weeks, Afghan women had moved from years of complete exclusion to participation in the new government. They were able to return to work; the beginning of the new school year was marked by girls going to school for the first time in their lives. However, women's participation in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, despite two ministerial positions in the Loya Jirga and modest representation on the various Commissions continues to be jeopardized by the lack of security across the country. Intimidation and violence by regional and local commanders against women continue unabated. Restrictions on women's freedom of movement still continue to limit women's access to employment and education. In some regions, local leaders have been reported as actively pressuring women not to work, including for international organizations. And, of course, inadequate resources remains a problem particularly for the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Another key concern is the drafting of the new Constitution. While the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the Transitional Administration in March this year was a great step forward, the drafting and consultation process will be an indication of the degree to which there is true respect and progress for women's rights in Afghanistan.

Given Afghanistan's past, the approach to integrating gender perspectives in the reconstruction of Afghanistan has had to balance the principle of women's right to full participation in their society and the fear of conservative backlash. Afghanistan is at a crucial moment in its recovery from decades of conflict. Progress for women and girls in Afghanistan will require continuous and resolute support by the UN system as a whole, the bilateral and multilateral donors and NGOs on a long-term basis.

Women, Peace and Security

While the situation in Afghanistan still leaves much room for concern and deserves our continued attention, we should also look at reconstruction efforts in a broader context. Sustainable and durable peace requires the participation of women and girls, as well as the integration of gender perspectives in all reconstruction processes. Reconstruction efforts that are based on human rights principles, including non-discrimination, can avoid perpetuating situations of inequality and discrimination and lead to the creation of more equitable and sustainable societies.

An important tool in this context is Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security adopted on 31 October 2000. This broke new ground on mandating women's involvement in all aspects of peace operations from early warning and prevention of conflict to post-conflict reconstruction and nation building. The Secretary-General's study "*Women, Peace and Security*" prepared in close collaboration with the Network's

Task Force on Women, Peace and Security and his report to the Security Council of October 2002 provide considerable information on the impact of conflict on women and girls and good practices, lessons learned and recommendations on gender issues throughout all phases of peace operations. I am confident that our workshop will contribute to the implementation of this resolution. I am also confident as we look ahead that it will contribute to the discussion by the 48th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2004 and to the ten-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the critical areas - women and armed conflict - in the Beijing Platform for Action and of the outcome document of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly (Beijing +5) scheduled for the 2005 session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

A Full Agenda

Our four past joint workshops in Geneva in 1997 on Gender Mainstreaming, in Rome in 1998 on a Rights-Based Approach to Gender Equality, in Bangkok in 1999 on Women's Empowerment in the Context of Human Security, and in Vienna on Governance, Poverty Reduction and Gender Equality were all characterized by stimulating discussions on cutting-edge issues and by brief, but coherently worded communiqués. Whilst our background papers, websites and other material, are replete with detailed activities which many of our Governments and organizations, in partnership with the Transitional Government and civil society are carrying out on the ground in Afghanistan, we are here not so much to describe these, but to highlight lessons learned from where we have scored high and where we have not made even a passing grade. In this way, we can improve our collective performance in Afghanistan and also ensure that the international community responds more effectively in other troubled situations such as Cote d'Ivoire, Iraq, and Liberia. They led to recommendations for concrete actions and initiatives to promote the issues. I feel sure that our deliberations here in Paris will be as equally stimulating of other workshops and will increase the effectiveness of international reconstruction efforts so that women and men can benefit equally from what our respective Governments and organizations can offer to the rebuilding of their societies.

We have a full agenda before us for the rest of today and tomorrow. Your active participation in the workshops is critical. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to strengthen the cooperation between our Networks for practical outcomes. I wish us all a very successful workshop.
