

**Verbal report in response to General Assembly resolution 62/137
of 19 December 2007 on the
Improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system
by
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Background

Pursuant to resolution, 62/137 of 19 December 2007 I now report on the representation of women in the United Nations system, the representation of women in the secretariat and in intergovernmental bodies, developments in the UN system, recommendations from the Expert Group Meeting on Measures to Accelerate the Improvement of the Status of Women in the UN system, and progress to date.

In the United Nations system¹:

As of 31 December 2006, (the latest figures available) the representation of women in the Professional and higher categories remains virtually the same as the previous year, standing at 37.7 per cent in the Professional and higher categories, and at 24.7 per cent at the D-1 level and above. At the current rate of progress – that is at the 1.13 percent average annual increment between 1998 and 2006 - gender balance will be reached in 2027 at the D-1 level. (see annex 1)

- **Gender balance** was achieved in two organizations: UNITAR and UNFPA. In addition, UNICEF and ICSC both have 47 percent women.

In the Secretariat for all professional and higher category staff with appointments of one year or more² :

As of 31 December 2007 women represent 37.3 per cent **overall**, an **increase of 0.02 percentage** points since 31 December 2006;

- At the D-2 and P-5 levels there have been decreases of 2.7 and 1.2 per cent in the representation of women, bringing the percent to 22.9 and 30.1 at the these levels respectively.
- At the P-5 level, at the current rate of progress (0.17 percent average annual increment between 1998 and 2007) gender balance will be reached in 2120. (see annex 2)
- A cursory review of recent trends in voluntary separations reveals a 20 per cent increase in the number of women opting to separate from the organization. This trend will have to be further reviewed and is worthy of some attention.
- **However, there is also opportunity. Expected retirements in the next five years constitute approximately 26.2 % of P-5s and 39.9% of D level posts. That should allow for a more accelerated bridging of the gap.**

Gender imbalance is also found in High-level representation in intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations.

¹ Secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination

² Source: OHRM Table 15A

A cursory review in January 2008 of some bodies' membership appointed by Member States reveals that women are underrepresented. For example, women represent **41.2%** of the membership of the seven human rights treaty bodies; **two** of these are chaired by women namely the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). When CEDAW (**95.5%** women) and CRC (50 per cent women) are excluded, women represent only **23%** of the membership of the remaining five treaty bodies. Of the six committees of the current sixty-second session of the General Assembly, only **the Second Committee is chaired by women**. However, it should be noted that women make up **40 per cent** of bureaux members of CSW, an increase of **20%** from the previous session.

In terms of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations, there are **18** women in New York, **19** in Geneva and **23** in Vienna. That corresponds to **10%, 12.9% and 19.2%, respectively**.

With respect to developments in UN system:

The SG presents bi-annual reports on the Improvement in the Status of Women in the UN system which monitor the progress towards the GA mandated goal of gender parity. The latest reports (A/59/357 and A/61/318) include analysis of the causes of the slow advancement in the improvement of the status of women in the secretariat and in the UN system respectively. The reports contain approximately thirty recommendations in the areas of gender strategy, gender planning statistics, recruitment, selection, career planning, mobility, working climate and culture and accountability. In addition to reporting, the system wide work on gender balance is considered a good practice example in UN reform and harmonization.

In addition, last year my office organized **an expert group meeting on measures to accelerate progress**. I briefly summarize its most salient recommendations.

Summary of Expert Group Recommendations

The meeting gathered best practices and recommendations from academia and the private and public sectors globally. The Experts validated and reinforced the measures found in the SG's 2006 report (A/61/318) Improvement in the status of women in the United Nations system. They concluded amongst other things that without a reinvigoration of special measures and policies that facilitate flexibility and a more sensitive work environment, gender balance could not be reached, or for that matter sustained. They emphasized most prominently the centrality and need for a consistent message from the highest levels in support of accelerated progress and recommended that to improve the career progression of women, flexible working arrangements needed to become the norm and recognized as the standard option for all staff. Training managers and staff on flexible work arrangements to increase productivity and holding managers accountable by tracking requests that come in and the percentage accepted and declined would increase their use. Other recommendations included the development and implementation of a comprehensive and effective gender strategy; measures to achieve parity in the promotion rates between women and men, improved accountability through the inclusion of progress towards gender balance in managers' performance appraisals, and measures to counteract bias and stereotyping in promotion and hiring decisions. Greater inter-agency mobility was also strongly recommended as a means to further harmonization across the UN system, widen opportunity for women's career development and broaden the pool of qualified women candidates available at any given time. Currently, the Secretariat treats only P-4 and P-5 level staff members as internal candidates. This measure may both be broadened to include the higher levels and be instituted system wide as a good practice.

Progress in the Secretariat

We are off to a very good start regarding policy developments in 2008. The following are some of the specific developments that we are working on and anticipate in the upcoming year:

- First, and to set an appropriate tone from the very top, the Secretary-General is expected very shortly to convey a personal and strong message to all heads of department that urgent and substantial progress has to be made to accelerate progress in gender balance and that he expects them to be held accountable.
- The Deputy Secretary-General will lead an effort to design a forceful and forward-looking **gender strategy** that will articulate policy and measures to make more effective the Organization's commitment to achieving gender balance.
- Revised, updated terms of reference for the department gender focal points to ensure adequate access to senior management, and appropriate participation in all processes with a bearing on gender balance are expected to be promulgated soon.
- The Secretariat is expected to institute a **gender score card for each department and office**, as part of the twice yearly reporting to the Management Committee. Such a "score card" could include, for example, relevant statistics, information on the use of flexible working arrangements; functioning of the gender focal point system; use of the roster in staff selection; additional measures being taken; and other relevant indicators.
- A Secretary-General's Bulletin on the "Prohibition of discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority" was issued on February 11.
- The **Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support (DFS)** have taken steps in the past year to enhance efforts to identify suitable qualified women. For example, a small dedicated capacity has been established within DFS focused on leadership appointments. Similar initiatives have been taken in the Field Personnel Division, Military Division and the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions.

To conclude let me use the words of the Secretary-General. In an interview published in All Africa on 27 December 2007 he said "We need to change the UN culture and re-engineer the United Nations for life in our fast-paced modern world. We need to move faster and more effectively in responding to global challenges, within all three pillars of the UN's work: peace and security, economic and social development, and human rights. As a UN team, we need to be more mobile and more flexible." The same measures which will improve gender balance in the UN will meet the SG's objectives. I think this is clear. As you can see, we have had a very good start to the year. I hope the trend will continue and intensify such that next year I can report even more positively.

The United Nations must be a more modern, flexible, balanced and productive work place, where men and women feel honoured to serve with dedication and high morale. And, achieving gender balance is most certainly central to this objective.

Thank you.

ANNEX 1

Status of Women in the UN System at a Glance (as of 31 December 2006)

Representation of women (percentage)													
P2		P3		P4		P5		D1		D2		UG	
1998	2006	1998	2006	1998	2006	1998	2006	1998	2006	1998	2006	1998	2006
53	57	40	43	29	35	20	29	17	26	16	23	14	21
4 (tot. increment)		3 (tot. increment)		6 (tot. increment)		9 (tot. increment)		9 (tot. increment)		7 (tot. increment)		7 (tot. increment)	
0.5 (average annual increment)		0.375 (average annual increment)		0.75 (average annual increment)		1.13 (average annual increment)		1.13 (average annual increment)		0.88 (average annual increment)		0.88 (average annual increment)	

Year at which gender parity will be reached at current average annual increment	P2	P3	P4	P5	D1	D2	UG
At current average annual increment	achieved	2025	2026	2025	2027	2037	2039

Required average annual increase to achieve gender balance of 50% in all professional categories by 2010 and in all D and higher categories by 2015 (percentage terms)						
P2	P3	P4	P5	D1	D2	UG
achieved	1.75	3.75	5.25	3	3	3

Source: Table 11C - Secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executive Board for Coordination
 *UG – (Ungraded) – ASG and above
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ANNEX 2

Status of Women in the Secretariat at a Glance (as of 30 June 2007)

Representation of women (percentage)																
	P2		P3		P4		P5		D1		D2		ASG		USG	
	1998	2007	1998	2007	1998	2007	1998	2007	1998	2007	1998	2007	1998	2007	1998	2007
Total %	45.4	49.7	39.4	41.2	32.3	34.5	29.3	30.8	23.7	28.5	18.8	24.0	13.0	20.8	11.1	15.4
Total change %	4.3		1.8		2.2		1.5		4.8		5.2		7.8		4.3	
Average annual increment %	.48		.20		.24		.17		.53		.58		.87		.48	

Year at which gender parity will be reached at current average annual increment	P2	P3	P4	P5	D1	D2	ASG	USG
At current average annual increment	2008	2052	2072	2120	2048	2052	2041	2080
By meeting 1% annual increase target in the HRAPs	2008	2018	2023	2027	2029	2033	2036	2042

Required average annual increase to achieve 50% gender balance in all professional categories by 2010 and in all D and higher categories by 2015 (percentage)							
P2	P3	P4	P5	D1	D2	ASG	USG
.10	2.93	5.17	6.40	2.69	3.25	3.65	4.33

Source: Office of Human Resources data