

UPDATE ON UN COHERENCE PANEL MEETING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY GENEVA, JULY 2006

Background:

In February of 2006, the Secretary-General announced the formation of a High-Level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in the areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and the Environment. This panel is comprised of fifteen members,¹ but only three are women. The panel will make recommendations about how the UN should be structured, including at the national and global levels; address new challenges, many of which were delineated in the 2005 UN World Summit; and discuss how the UN system can meet the various internationally agreed goals, particularly the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

During the Commission on the Status of Women meeting in March 2006, women's groups released an Open Letter to the Secretary General and member states deploring the lack of gender balance on the Panel and the absence of gender equality concerns in the initial mandate, both in terms of gender mainstreaming and women's machineries of the UN system.² Due in part to our persistent lobbying, the Secretary General has expanded the mandate of the Coherence Panel to include both "gender equality architecture" of the UN and gender mainstreaming, and has made gender equality a cross-cutting issue for all three themes.

Current Process:

Since May 2006, the Coherence Panel has conducted a series of thematic and regional consultations as well as field visits in Kenya, Mozambique, Pakistan and Rome, primarily with UN Staff, but also with others knowledgeable about the UN system. Other regional meetings were scheduled to be held such as in Tirana and Cairo but were cancelled. The LAC regional consultation will likely take place in Barbados in mid-July.³ We encourage engagement from women's groups at this hearing as well. In addition, individual Panel members are meeting with groups around the world.

On July 2, the Panel is expected to consult with about 60 civil society representatives from around the world to discuss the cross-cutting themes of gender equality, human rights and the environment. The Geneva consultations with civil society represent an important opportunity for women's rights groups to lay out the organizational and systemic problems associated with the gender equality architecture throughout the UN, both at the national and global levels.

¹ The list of panel members is available at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sgsm10349.doc.htm>.

² This letter is available at: <http://www.wedo.org/library.aspx?ResourceID=106> and at <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/unadvocacy/index.html>

³ For a detailed list of regional meetings, please see <http://www.wedo.org/files/coherence%20panel%20regional%20mtgs.doc>.

Women's groups will meet prior to the Panel consultations to strategize on overall messages for the hearings. It will be a chance for women's groups to get together to explore strategies and make more concrete recommendations about the structural changes that ought to happen in order to turn gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment goals into reality. Our submissions should highlight the essential characteristics of the ideal gender equality architecture that would be able to deliver positive and consistent outcomes on gender equality and women's empowerment.

These discussions will also constitute the basis of our longer-term advocacy efforts leading to the 61st session of the General Assembly where member states will negotiate the panel's recommended reforms to the current architecture, or at least recommended processes for making such reforms.

The July 2 Civil Society Consultations in Geneva:

The NGLS has made available information (agenda, meeting schedule, etc) on the civil society consultation on their website. As of today, only three Panelists are confirmed as participants in Geneva. Ruth Jacoby, Director-General for Development Cooperation, MFA (Sweden) and Josette S. Shiner, Under Secretary for Economic, Business and Agricultural Affairs, US Department of State (USA) are both certain, while the third Panelist is still to be announced.

On the NGLS website you will find in a background paper describing the objectives, structure and agenda of the meeting. It also provides a brief statement of the critical issues for each topic and a set of questions that can serve as guidelines for both oral and written submissions. Please see http://www.un-ngls.org/site/article.php3?id_article=70.

A brief set of guidelines has also been posted for Topic II: Gender Equality: Mainstreaming and Institution Architecture:

- How can gender equality, including through gender mainstreaming, be better and more fully addressed in the work of the United Nations, given its roles in standard setting, advocacy, analysis and operational activities? Where do you see the clear added value of the UN vis-à-vis other development partners (in particular civil society organizations)? And are there areas in which the UN in your view does not have sufficient comparative strength and should withdraw?
- Do you see gender equality issues as effectively integrated into UN agencies' policy frameworks and programs? Why or why not? If you've had experience working with UN agencies on these issues - either at the country level or policy development - what lessons would you draw to improve the UN's performance in this area?
- To what degree have gender mainstreaming initiatives been successful? Which aspects (or enabling factors) of gender mainstreaming are in place within the UN system, and what constraints still hinder the implementation of effective mainstreaming?
- What measures need to be taken to achieve clarity throughout the UN system with respect to institutional responsibilities and concerted action on gender equality? What specific role do you see in this for the UN's gender-specific entities? What lessons should be drawn from progress across the system to date? What gaps and challenges remain, and how can outcomes be improved?

See http://www.un-ngls.org/site/article.php3?id_article=73 for more.

Other ways Civil Society can influence the Coherence Panel:

We encourage you to make written submissions to the panel. The Panel's outcomes are expected to be submitted to the GA by the end of August, so there is a need to act quickly. There are two ways you can influence the panel in writing:

1. Submit comments directly to **Koen Davidse, the Coherence Panel's Research Director**, at koendavidse@hotmail.com.
2. Or send in your submission to the **NGLS, the organizers of the civil society hearing**, who have a call for comments until July 14. Though the original deadline was set to coincide with the Geneva consultations, this has been extended to provide a bit more time. Email: ngls@un.org (New York) or ngls@unctad.org (Geneva).

****Please copy all your submissions to unreform@peacewomen.org and unreform@wedo.org for us to be able to keep track of women's groups' input.**

You can provide the panel with information supported wherever possible, by concrete examples and data. Your written submissions could include examples both of the failure to deliver on gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the successes on the ground and what made them work. Consider responding to the following questions for your submissions.

- Do you see women's rights issues as effectively integrated into the UN System? Why or why not?
- What is needed at the country-level for enhanced and more effective gender mainstreaming?
- Have you found UN staff to be adequately resourced? Adequately trained in gender? Willing to fund or participate in projects related to women's human rights?
- What good models for gender mainstreaming have you experienced?
- What would have made your experiences working with the UN more effective?