

24 August 2011

OPEN LETTER TO MEMBER STATES OF THE UNITED NATIONS: RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE 66TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S GENERAL DEBATE

Dear Ambassador,

As you know, the General Debate at this year's 66th General Assembly will have a thematic focus on "Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution". The General Assembly's recent adoption of a resolution on this issue in June 2011 (A/RES/65/283) is a positive indicator that United Nations Member States recognize the importance of concerted efforts to end conflicts peacefully, and to preferably prevent them before they begin.

The importance of women's engagement in these processes has increasingly been recognized, including in this recent resolution (A/RES/65/283, OP 4, OP 9) and in the 2009 Secretary-General's report on mediation (S/2009/189, paragraphs 16, 17, 22, 23; Recommendation 62 (f), and Annex 4).

Despite this recognition, women are still overwhelmingly excluded from mediation efforts, and their rights and concerns are not consistently and concretely included in regular mediation practice. At the international level, the United Nations has still never appointed a woman as a high level mediator, as called for most recently in A/RES/65/283, OP 9.

Given the continuing barriers that women in particular face in gaining access to these processes, and the differential impact that armed conflict often has on women, we encourage you to emphasize the following key points in your statement at this year's General Debate:

- The importance of ensuring women's rights are fundamental to all guidelines and good practice established regarding mediation;
- The necessity of embedding women's rights in content of all peace agreements, and the role of mediators in assisting negotiating parties as to how this can be done;
- The central role women can play in all prevention efforts, and the need to support and promote women's participation in all these efforts;
- The urgent need for the UN to appoint senior women mediators, which would set an important example for promoting women's participation in peace policies and processes; and
- It would be particularly striking for you to speak of any practical examples of good practice where your country has supported women's inclusion in mediation processes and sought to ensure women's rights in peace agreements. Publicizing women's engagement in mediation would send a strong signal to the international community of your national commitment to women's empowerment.

We urge you to incorporate a gender perspective into your statement to the General Assembly, and we particularly hope that you use this opportunity to highlight the fact that good practice in mediation processes must include women's voices and women's rights. Please do not hesitate to contact us for additional information or to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,

Sarah Taylor

EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR, NGO WORKING GROUP ON WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY

The NGOWG on Women, Peace and Security advocates for the equal and full participation of women in all efforts to create and maintain international peace and security. Formed in 2000 to call for a Security Council resolution on Women, Peace and Security, the NGOWG now focuses on implementation of all Security Council resolutions that address this issue. The NGOWG serves as a bridge between women's human rights defenders working in conflict-affected situations and policy-makers at U.N. Headquarters.