

WILPF SECRETARY GENERAL, MADELEINE REES, ON THE UN DESIGNATION OF WONDER WOMEN

October 26, 2016

Tough choice really but “hats off to the geniuses at the Department of Public Information for giving women what we really wanted... a cartoon character as an ambassador for our equality!” Nice one.

Not that I am being churlish but there are a few issues in play here. First, women campaigned and demanded that we be taken seriously, that [it was time for a woman to be the Secretary General of the United Nations](#). It didn't happen. We remain in hope that Guterres will show himself able to understand why we wanted a woman and will take the requisite actions at the UN to rid us of its patriarchal ways. We will do all we can to support and make this happen of course, but we will also promise to make a lot of noise if he fails us.

In this will we have the support of Wonder Woman? (I wish...)

Of course we don't, she is a fictional, she is not real, so she will not be able to go meet with those who must be met with to explain SDG 5 and how to achieve it. She will not be able to go plot with UNWomen, to strategise how to get the World Bank on board, neither will she be there to give support to grass roots women's organisations and individuals who must be the architects of change. Interestingly, neither will she be able to explain why the militarisation of security and the diversion of funds away from real and sustainable development, will prevent the realisation of many if not all of the SDGs, and most certainly not the SDG she ostensibly champions.

And if she were real, would she do that anyway? Wonder Woman is always gorgeous, always smart, she was historically skilled in the art of defence, but in her new incarnation ([the film coming in 2017](#)), she appears to be phenomenal; ruthless in using extreme violence against those she has taken as enemies. So would she want to talk down the militarists or

would she want just take them out? Tempting to reduce complicated narratives to this simplistic Hollywood approach and tragic that we can make something as important as SDG 5 into a Hollywood production.

Which raises another issue. Who outside of America really knows anything about Wonder Woman? Is she relevant in DRC or Ukraine? And is it good that she wears very little and reveals a lot? Will she catch on in the Middle East? I think not.

Sorry if the UN Department of Public Information thinks that we feminists have no sense of humour, we do, and if there were a woman, a real woman appointed as SG or a real woman to champion SDG 5 then maybe we wouldn't feel quite as if someone was sitting behind his desk laughing at us.

A word to our sisters in the UN system: Good on you for standing up on this one! We support you! We know you have felt reservation and fear in taking on the patriarchal culture in the UN. They are unforgiving as so many of us know; but now is the time to expose all of this. Now there is a movement to say enough is enough – of all of this. Trump didn't mean to, but he has made us all bolder in refusing to accept what men do to women and pretend it's ok. It is not. Wherever we are in whatever capacity, (and whatever sex we are), we now stand up – and remain standing until we win.