

Speech

Women's Participation and Leadership: Vital to Democratic Governance

By Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM

Date: 13 January 2004

Occasion: Summit on the Americas, Monterrey, Mexico, 13 January 2004

Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be here this morning and grateful to have the opportunity to talk to you about the critically important issues of governance and women's participation in order to obtain better outcomes for development, peace and security.

The issues of democratic governance assumes enormous significance in the current debate on how to shape a more secure future for all. The concern has increased because of the growing realization that conventional development and governance approaches have failed to achieve desired ends -- the elimination of poverty and inequality and the provision of world peace. There is a greater desire to consider ways in which power has been exercised in the management of economic and political processes for development and in addressing the emerging issues and threats to human survival.

Today, it is widely accepted that the full participation of all citizens, both men and women, is the best way to build and sustain

democracies, reduce conflict and achieve human development. Comprising over 50 per cent of the world's population, women are essential to addressing the pressing challenges we face today: achieving the Millennium Development Goals, creating more accountable institutions of governance, ensuring more equitable resource allocation, combating HIV/AIDS and guaranteeing peace and security. The issues affecting women are not only women's issues - they have profound implications for all of humanity. Yet everywhere, women continue to be under-represented -- as leaders and problem solvers, decision-makers or elected officials. Many discriminatory laws and practices still prevent women from playing a role in shaping the policies that affect their lives. Also, many women still do not have full understanding of their rights, nor knowledge of how to participate in complex economic and political processes nor how to hold their leaders accountable. And in spite of their potential to offer innovative solutions, especially in a time of crisis, they are rarely those to whom nations turn first.

There is an urgent need for the leadership and participation of women if we are to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Three realities increasingly define our world, presenting new challenges for governments and the international community: globalization, fragmentation and insecurity, and problems without borders.

Challenges of the 21st Century

While debate continues about the impact of *globalization*, it is clear that it creates both opportunities and risks, and winners and losers. It has generated new connectivity among economic actors, accelerating diffusion of technology, skills and new economic opportunities for countries and individuals. But it has also been

experienced in terms of privatization of social services and public resources; and dramatic increases in economic inequality. While more women are entering the paid labour force, jobs are often low paid and insecure, intensifying existing inequalities. Reductions in public expenditures also fall most heavily on women, who must fill the gaps in needed services. Women are offering creative ways to reshape globalization to work for all people; we must make sure their ideas are heard.

Fragmentation and insecurity are increasing in countries and communities worldwide. There is a new wave of dramatic crises related to extremism with decreasing respect for human rights, eroding financial commitment to development and responsibilities in an increasingly interrelated world. There is deep skepticism about the ability of existing institutions and strategies to cope with new threats as community networks and social fabric are breaking apart. More than ever women are realizing that they need greater opportunities to shape and direct the changes in their world. Despite what they have experienced, many women are organizing for peace and reconstruction, are engaging in disarmament and demobilization processes as well as with the process of truth and reconciliation. Their efforts need to be recognized, valued and supported as part of the solution to create sustainable peace.

Finally, the world is increasingly defined by *problems without borders*, including HIV/AIDS and trafficking -- in arms, drugs, and people. For women the lines between legal and illegal migration, trafficking and human smuggling are increasingly blurred in their desperate search for livelihoods. The HIV/AIDS pandemic sweeps across national borders, fueled by gender discrimination and violence against women. Worldwide, women comprise 50 per cent of

those affected; in Latin America and the Caribbean they make up 31 per cent and 52 per cent in the Caribbean alone. Women are demanding an end to the gender-based violence and discrimination that keep them powerless to control their lives -- economically, politically and sexually. They need our support.

Increasingly, governments have acknowledged the need to change institutional policies and practices and to build partnerships for sustainable human development as the basis of peace in the 21st century. They recognize the critical role of women in addressing these challenges. At the Millennium Summit in September 2000, the nations of the world committed themselves to a world free from fear and free from want. The Millennium Declaration identified gender equality and women's empowerment both as a goal in themselves and as essential to achieving all of the other goals. Commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action and in CEDAW, which has now been ratified by 174 states, have been translated into regional contexts, including the Convention of Belem do Para and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. More than 118 countries have National Plans of Action for Gender Equality as well as laws and policies to promote women's human rights in specific areas, from education to land ownership.

The challenge is to turn commitment to action. As the Secretary-General's report, *From Beijing to Beijing +5* stated in 2000 - an improved understanding of gender equality does not necessarily automatically translate into gender equality in practice. Despite progress, the persistence of traditional and stereotypic gender roles, often reinforced by legal and/or institutional structures, impedes women's empowerment. Promotion of gender equality continues to be relegated to a lower level of national priority.

In a world that is growing more complex, the development of a more inclusive society based on democratic governance enables all citizens to participate and shape policies and practices to bring about greater equality, peace and security. Women are the vital, but often the missing, link in this process.

From Commitments to Reality

Latin America and the Caribbean has seen a steady drop in per capita income each year since 1997. There are 20 million more poor Latin Americans in 2003 than there were in 1997 -- and unemployment has reached more than 10 per cent. However, the economic picture has recently begun to brighten: a December ECLAC report predicts a regional economic growth rate of 3.5 per cent in 2004, leaving behind the six-year period that went before. For the first time since 1997, ECLAC notes, there is no Latin American economy for which negative growth is projected. Interestingly, the report adds: it appears that the projected growth cycle will be stronger in those countries that have made efforts to reconcile improved economic governance with better political governance.

Improving women's economic security

As the region is now poised to take greater advantage of the opportunities created by globalization, it is essential to look also at the links between economic performance and gender. Gender-based inequalities in terms of access to and control over land, capital, skills, and time not only hinder women's ability to escape from poverty, but constrain the performance of whole economies. Gender inequalities in education, health and access to resources weaken productivity and growth rates.

For a country to benefit from emerging employment and earning opportunities in the globalizing economy, investment in women's skills and knowledge are crucial. The capacity to provide productive and satisfying work in an increasingly competitive labour market, and the just distribution of the benefits of work are critical to countries that are becoming more open and democratic. By paying attention to women's economic security and rights, the gains from globalization could be multiplied and become more visible to broader segments of people.

A globalization process in which women have an equal chance to benefit from opportunities also requires greater labour market flexibility and a change in the way we value women's work. As long as women are treated as "short-term", "casual", and "informal" workers and concentrated in semi-skilled sectors, there will be a disincentive to invest in women. As long as gender discrimination and cultural stereotypes continue to limit women's choices and options, the potential of countries to achieve sustained economic growth and prosperity will be hampered. So also will be the ways that governments can respond to the needs of people. In short, where there is gender inequality there is also a dangerous barrier to development and democratic governance!

UNIFEM has supported women's efforts to put gender on the economic policy agenda -- building the capacity of women, governments and institutions to make the link between gender and economic policy decisions, including women's work in the unpaid care economy, the analysis and formulation of national and local budgets and the collection of gender disaggregated data and statistics.

How a country raises revenues and allocates its resources is an excellent measure of its willingness to honour its commitments to gender equality. Gender analysis of budgets examines the allocation of public resources among women and men and reflects how women's unpaid care work and tax payments can be accounted for. UNIFEM is supporting the analysis of national, municipal and sectoral budgets from a gender perspective in 20 countries and localities, in order to raise awareness of the kinds of investments needed to make these commitments a reality. In Ecuador, a gender budget exercise by the municipality of Cuenca, supported by UNIFEM, resulted in the development of an Equal Opportunities Plan to strengthen the system of social, legal and health services for women and allocations to promote gender equality 15 times higher in 2003 than in previous years.

Providing data to measure progress

The ability to capture women's experiences in order to inform policy-making is limited by the availability of appropriate statistics, including those disaggregated by sex. At the country level, the basis for all national statistics is the census. While in theory this registers the activities of each individual, the way it is carried out in many cases makes women's activities less visible than men's. Many women are not considered part of the economically active population if they work in the household or the fields. In many cases, women are not even interviewed; instead, the so-called head of household, usually a man, is asked to describe the work of everyone in the family.

UNIFEM is supporting projects to train census takers on ways to probe for gender-sensitive information and encouraged Census

Bureaus to provide sex-disaggregated results. In the Arab States, a project called Gender Equality Measured through Statistics(GEMS) focuses on building gender statistics relating to decision-making, the formal and informal economy, and violence against women.

Women's organizations in Latin America are also working to construct measures of how far their governments have fulfilled commitments made to women. Supported by FLACSO (Facultad Latinamericana de Ciencias Sociales) and UNIFEM, Indexes of Fulfilled Commitments have been constructed in Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Uruguay -- and are being completed in 10 more countries -- looking at citizen participation and access to power; economic autonomy and employment; and women's health and reproductive rights. Commitments in each of these areas are translated into quantitative targets, and indicators of progress towards them are identified. The degree of fulfillment of each target is measured and women decide how to weight the individual components to create an index for the percentage of the target achieved in recent years for each area as well as for all three. In each country, women's organizations decide which commitments to prioritize, how to translate these into targets and how to measure progress towards the targets.

Promoting political participation and decision-making

Human development starts from the perspective of men and women as citizens with rights and opportunities for participation in the decision-making forums of their society -- from the household and community to the market place, the workplace, and in all levels of public assemblies and offices. Currently, the only indicator that can be tabulated worldwide is women's share of seats in national

parliaments. And around the world women are largely absent from parliaments, on average accounting for only about 14 per cent of members in 2002. In Latin America and the Caribbean, by the end of 2003, Cuba, Argentina and Costa Rica had all passed the 30 per cent benchmark. In the English-speaking Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago comes closest, with women's share of seats reaching 25.6 per cent. And in Mexico, following the most recent election in July 2003, women's share of seats increased from 16 per cent to 21.2 per cent.

Interestingly, women's representation in the legislature in many developing countries, including 15 in Latin America and the Caribbean is higher than that in some more affluent countries, including both the United States and France, showing the power of political will.

UNIFEM supports women to stand for elections at all levels -- from local to national -- and advocates for the policies that give them a chance to win. In Morocco, with UNIFEM support, women successfully advocated for the adoption of a quota, the first in the Arab World, contributing to 35 women winning seats in parliament, compared to only two in the previous legislature. In Burundi, advocacy facilitated by UNIFEM has resulted in women occupying 20 per cent of decision-making positions in the national assembly and the senate. In the recent elections in Rwanda, women won 49 per cent of the seats in parliament, outranking even the Scandinavian countries.

Increasing women's share of seats in parliament is not a panacea. It can only level the playing field on which women battle for equality. While women campaign for equal representation, they recognize that

this is no guarantee that elected women will make decisions that benefit the majority of women. Not only do individual women have many different priorities, there are many structural factors that prevent women from promoting laws and policies that empower women. The power of parliamentarians may be limited by national constitutions that give greater power to the executive; by the decisions of international investors or the conditions of international financial institutions such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund; or by the rules of international organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). Despite all this, women's presence is essential. Their absence from national legislatures signals that women are not accepted as equal partners in political decision-making.

Women's presence is especially important in post conflict situations when new constitutions and parliaments are often being created. They have brought about changes in inheritance law, land rights and promoted women's participation in economic and political life. Until recently, women were almost completely excluded from peace-building and post-war decision-making. Now, with the support of UNIFEM and other organizations, women's participation is receiving more attention. The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 in October 2000 urging member states to increase women's participation at all levels of decision-making in preventing and resolving conflict, including negotiating and implementing peace agreements and post-conflict reconstruction. Since then, women have been included in the decision-making mechanisms of the new state of Timor Leste -- gaining 26 per cent of the votes to set up a Constituent Assembly in August 2001. This body became the national parliament in May 2002, when Timor Leste officially became independent. Recently, the inclusion of representatives from every

province, every ethnic group and of women in the Constitutional Loya Jirga of Afghanistan helped shape a broadly acceptable constitution that provides the basis of a more hopeful future, and with more chance of success.

In peacetime, too, when countries revise or create new constitutions, it is essential to provide gender expertise and take advantage of opportunities to strengthen gender equality provisions. In Bolivia women's networks secured support from UNIFEM to advocate for major proposals that found their way into the new constitution. The proposals pertained to equal legal rights and gender-specific rights, such as recognition of the contribution made by women performing domestic work.

Working for a world free of violence and combating HIV/AIDS

Two of the challenges of our globalized world are those I have called problems without borders: the rise in human trafficking and the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer and harbouring of persons for the purpose of exploitation, including prostitution, sexual exploitation, forced labour and slavery. Now a multi-billion dollar industry run by individuals as well as organized crime networks, it affects vulnerable individuals, particularly women and children, in all regions. Its purposes include not only prostitution, debt bondage, and domestic labour, but also the exploitation of children as captive labourers, child soldiers and sex slaves. While statistics are hard to compile, an estimated 700,000 persons, mainly women and children are trafficked into modern forms of slavery each year, the majority from South and Southeast Asia. Some 45,000-50,000 women and girls are trafficked into the United States. A 1999

communiqué from the G-8 countries on combating transnational organized crime identified the phenomenon as the dark side of globalization.'

The trafficking of women and children must be examined within a broader context of labour migration (legal and illegal) and the movement of people from conflict zones and crisis situations as refugees and internally displaced persons. Prevention requires a multi-national, multi-sectoral approach that respects human rights and locates the causes of migration and trafficking within national development strategies. For women and girls this means not only providing viable economic alternatives to opportunities elsewhere, but also empowering women to address the underlying causes of their marginalization and gender inequality.

UNIFEM is working in Southeast Asia and the Arab States in countries of both origin and destination to find such remedies. In Jordan, the destination country for many women in Asia, UNIFEM's initiative resulted in the formulation of a minimum standard contract for migrant women workers that stipulates their rights, such as the right to medical care, rest days and timely payment of wages. It will be used by the Ministry of Labour to monitor working conditions. UNIFEM also supported the drafting of a new law to regulate the work of agencies recruiting migrant workers, which will enable Jordanian authorities to act against violations against migrant worker rights.

Finally, two more statistics deserve attention. Worldwide, one in three women will suffer violence during her lifetime -- raped, beaten, coerced into sex, trafficked, harassed. And among people with HIV/AIDS, some 20 million, one in two are women. A decade ago,

women seemed peripheral to this pandemic; now they are at the epicenter.

Violence against women is both a cause and consequence of rising rates of HIV infection. Rape and sexual assault are a brutal reality for women worldwide -- and a major risk factor for HIV transmission. Deeply rooted in unequal power relations, sexual violence occurs because women cannot refuse sex or negotiate its terms. In conflict zones, the systematic rape of women by warring factions has dramatically increased HIV infection rates -- and destroyed the lives of women and families. Yet violence against women is also a result of HIV/AIDS: when a woman discloses that she is seropositive she may be attacked because of the stigma that is brought to the family.

To break this vicious cycle, countries must ensure that effective laws are passed and implemented. UNIFEM is reviewing legislation that relates to both containing the spread of HIV/AIDS and domestic violence in a number of countries. While many countries have strong laws in place there is a serious gap in implementation. UNIFEM is also fostering a dialogue between policy-makers and HIV-positive women's networks so that their experience and needs can be taken into account in shaping policy. Men and young people also play a role: campaigns by men or young people in Latin America and the Caribbean seek to reduce gender violence by addressing the macho culture that perpetuates violence and puts both men and women at risk.

Finally, as resources begin to go into the effort, it is important that they not go only to the provision of anti-retroviral drugs or abstinence campaigns. Funding must also be provided to address the elimination of violence against women; one effective channel is

the Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence against Women which was established by the United Nations General Assembly and is managed by UNIFEM.

Conclusion

In 2000, on the occasion of the five year review of progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, I told the General Assembly that we need to ACT:

"We need to ensure *accountability* to agreements in the Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women -- now ratified by 170 countries -- by strengthening monitoring and reporting mechanisms. We need to demonstrate *commitment* through the resources that we make available, the laws that we enact, and through design of policies and programmes that support gender equality. We need to promote *transformation* , through ensuring that the perspectives, interests and contributions of women and girls shape our world, in accord with international human rights conventions and the development targets reached at various UN conferences. When we gather together at the next assessment opportunity, we will be judged not by our words but by our actions.

"The stakes for women are high. Women want a world in which inequality based on gender, class, caste and ethnicity is absent from every country and from the relationships among countries. Women want a world where fulfillment of basic needs becomes basic rights and where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated. Where women's unpaid work of nurturing, caring and weaving the fabric of community will be valued and shared equally by men. Where each person will have the opportunity to develop her or his full potential and creativity. Where progress for women is recognized as progress for all. Creating this world is truly the challenge of the 21st century.