



# Network

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## INTERVIEW WITH MS. MADHUMITA (MITA) HOSALI

News and Media Division



Ms. Mita Hosali (India) started her career at the United Nations in 1982 in the Department of Public Information (DPI). She has worked in different divisions of DPI, and is currently in the News and Media Division, temporarily heading the News Services Section where she is responsible for outreach to editorial media, placement of opinion pieces by the Secretary-General and other senior officials, coordinating a strategic communications mechanism between DPI and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and currently overseeing the English and French news centres, the United Nations main news portal. She was elected the Departmental Focal Point for Women in DPI for two terms from 2003 to 2007. Ms. Hosali

has a Master's Degree in International Relations from Yale University and a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from the London School of Economics. Her husband is a Canadian and works for the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); she has two young children, Max and Nayanika. She understands only too well how difficult it is to manage dual-track careers and to balance this with child-care issues and is therefore pleased to see a more work-friendly environment beginning to take hold at the UN.

**Q:** *Please tell us briefly about yourself.*

**A:** I come from a family where the women always blazed a trail but they did so several generations earlier so I am a laggard, in some respects. My great-grandmother had been to college, held salons where she invited luminaries to discuss politics and

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literature—and she smoked! My mother always encouraged me not to plan my life around marriage and children when I was younger but to think about education, career and public service. And my father was equally a modern man who would not dream of saying there are things women should not do, and would push me to reach for the skies.

*Q: Which part of your functions as Departmental Focal Point for Women (DFPW) did you like the most?.*

*A: I liked to be able to be in a position to contribute to change, to interpret policy and to attempt to influence how managers approach human resources issues by viewing decisions through a gender prism. I also liked being able to be a sounding board, to advise women, to give them hope, to help those who sometimes seemed demoralized and just to help some navigate the UN rules and procedures. But most of all, I was enriched by my interaction with colleagues who taught me wisdom, compassion and solidarity.*

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## Letter from the Focal Point for Women

In this issue of NETWORK we draw your attention to the letter of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon calling on managers to be held accountable for achieving gender balance in the United Nations and for creating a positive environment for both men and women. Likewise, we highlight Deputy Secretary-General Rose Migiro's call for concrete action in attaining gender parity in her speech during Staff Day in April 2008. In this context, we also feature an interview with Ms. Mita Hosali, a former Focal Point for Women of the Department of Public Information. She shares experiences from her role as a former Focal Point, offering suggestions on how women may better advance themselves as leaders in the workplace. She also shares her concerns regarding women's issues at large.

Effective advocacy requires formal as well as informal mechanisms. This issue, therefore, includes information about the United Nations women advocacy group—The Group on Equal Rights for Women at the United Nations (GERWUN)—founded in 1971 to further women's equality within the Organization. Finally, our section on women's health updates readers on AIDS, breast cancer and diabetes, all of which require lifestyle changes. Further, we have summarized an interesting article on whistleblower programmes recommending how they could be tailored to benefit an organization. We report on women from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Mexico who are increasingly expressing themselves to have their voices heard, their struggles acknowledged and their needs met.

Within our Organization and around the world, we see that women's rights, representation and well-being are being fought for. Despite the gains to date, however, attaining and sustaining gender equality and women's needs will require that it remain a continuing endeavour on the part of many.

In solidarity,



Aparna Mehrotra

## INTERVIEW WITH MS. MADHUMITA HOSALI *(continued from p. 2)*

**Q:** *What topics do you believe constitute the next frontier of issues of concern to women—career development, work/life issues, mobility, development of a gender-sensitive and supportive work environment, others?*

**A:** Developing a gender-sensitive work environment is a prerequisite to all the other things falling into place. Career development for women would be meaningful if women felt there was a level playing field or were given the opportunity to perform at higher levels. If managers actually empowered women and created an environment where work/life balance was a reality, women would feel their multiple roles were being acknowledged and respected. It is disheartening, when among those who are not supportive of women colleagues, senior women say that a female colleague who looks for work-life balance is obviously not serious about career advancement. The litmus test for women and men proving that they are committed to their work should NOT be by spending long hours in the office and giving up time with their families—when colleagues at senior levels lead by example, that's when we will begin to live this change. There is a story, and I don't have the details, about the former Secretary-General Annan who had to leave early to pick up his kids when he was posted in Geneva. In the beginning he would have to struggle to get out of meetings, but then he would leave before meetings were over. Finally, however, he convinced all to hold meetings early enough so he could leave on time.

**Q:** *In your experience, at what level would you say women need to break the glass ceiling; and what pointers can you suggest?*

**A:** The real glass ceiling is at the P-4 level. Having done a very rough analysis of this in DPI, the time spent in grade at the P-4 level is just shocking. And I know the Secretariat figures on this are equally astounding. By way of advice, women ought to take opportunities to do special assignments, move laterally and, for those who can, consider missions.

**Q:** *Does having women in leadership positions make a difference in an organization? Do you think women are better leaders and show more empathy for their employees? And if so, how? (Give some examples.)*

**A:** Women in leadership positions have an excellent opportunity to set an example and to raise the bar, to

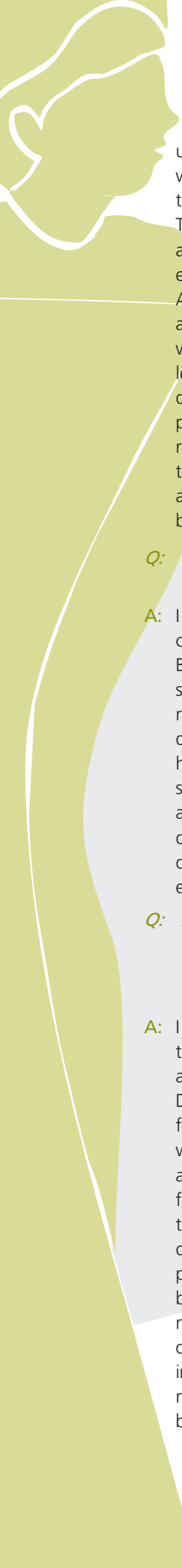
make a personal difference and to demonstrate that women can bring to management some qualities that are not always associated with male managers. This is not to say that women leaders are pushovers—just that they can approach problems and interpersonal relations differently. I happen to have been fortunate enough to have had male supervisors who were incredibly empathetic so I don't believe that empathy is the preserve of women either. I don't agree that women leaders are more empathetic—personality, culture and gender are all part of the mix. Ultimately, leadership is about inspiration, vision, delegation, responsibility and ownership by all—not about control and hierarchy, and women can excel as much as men if given the chance.

**Q:** *Do mentoring and training have any role in advancing women's careers? If so, how?*

**A:** I strongly recommend training to open your mind—I have benefited hugely. I also value feedback and peer review—I am an emphatic believer that, if we were judged by our peers and our subordinates, we would have a truer measure of our management capabilities. Clearly, mentoring is an important ingredient in a large multicultural organization—but how many bosses can truly lay claim to having guided their staff and colleagues? Mentoring is often about a natural predisposition that people should have to advise and look out for others. But what nobody talks openly about is how much lip-service is paid to gender-sensitivity, for example, by providing a tick-box in the PAS. Show me a manager who took a training course or organized one for his staff on creating a gender-sensitive environment, or gave his male supervisors high marks for proactive efforts on behalf of female staff, or put this in their work plan. Sadly, what usually prevails is that managers are rarely penalized for anti-gender approaches.

**Q:** *From your experience, which measures best contribute to the achievement of gender balance in your office and the UN system?*

**A:** I think the new Terms of References for the DFPWs (ST/SGB/2008/12) are extremely robust and we need them to overcome natural resistance and to persuade managers to realize the tremendous promise they contain. Having DFPWs involved in interviews is critical, having them review shortlists and personal history profiles is extremely important as a means of improving transparency. But above all, much will depend on whether Heads of Departments call



upon DFPWs for advice and then act on that advice which will drive the credibility of this effort to change the current landscape when it comes to gender. The statistics speak for themselves—why would anyone object to oversight of the selection process especially as that information is held in confidence? And I happen not to agree that there is a stigma to affirmative action—it is about looking at what sets women back and looking at candidates through this lens, not pushing for less qualified candidates. Why does any good leader try to draw on a variety of people from different backgrounds including gender, race and ethnicity to be his advisers? It's because they broaden and inform his frame of reference and decision-making paradigm. That's what gender balance is about, not just numbers.

*Q: What were the main problems you faced in this role?*

**A:** I received lots of support from some key senior colleagues and I thank them for their encouragement. But I also upset some managers who did not always see me as a peer who was discharging a mandate, but rather as undermining them or telling them what to do. This was the hardest part—to be outspoken and hold firm to principles knowing that you were being seen as an upstart, at times. I never claimed to have all the answers—but some managers did not like the questions I asked. The years I spent doing this were difficult but worthwhile; but I hope others have an equally generous view of my intentions and actions.

*Q: As a woman working in an organization that has yet to reach 50:50 gender equality, what decisions did you take to gain respect from male colleagues?*

**A:** I don't know about respect—I did my best and was thanked by many for my integrity and being a tireless advocate. The former Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Public Information under whom I served for four years said clearly that he did not always agree with my recommendations but he lauded me for my attention to detail, the objectivity that I always strove for and the fact that I did not automatically argue that the women candidates on the list were always better qualified. So, if I did earn some credibility, it was by just pointing out the positive attributes of female candidates, by respecting confidentiality and by depersonalizing my analysis of situations. Having served as DFPW for over four years, I can honestly say I never leaked any information to colleagues—and female candidates never came to me trying to extract information because they knew I would not share case details.

*Q: What do you feel could make a departmental focal point effective in discharging her role as departmental/gender focal point (e.g. consulting and helping colleagues, information, training, stronger guidelines on special measures, etc.)?*

**A:** An initial half-day workshop would be essential including case studies and the involvement of active DFPWs who can draw on their experience to provide guidance in real-life situations and how to navigate difficult moments. More opportunities for DFPWs to compare notes regularly would also be very helpful. And a Head of Department (HOD) who really takes the Terms of Reference seriously enough that he/she is willing to allow the DFPW to discharge her functions without fears that this may imply a loss of control over the staff selection process, for example. The HOD should seek out the views and input of the DFPW on all cases. Very simply, the HOD chooses, so what's to lose by allowing the DFPW an advisory role? The DFPW is a bridge between management and staff and has to retain the support of both, so managers should see this person as an aide to accomplishing their objectives, not a hurdle.

*Q: As Gender Focal Point, what are the particular issues that career women are facing today and would like to see addressed?*

**A:** Women still struggle to be taken seriously, certain actions by women are questioned, commitment to family life raises red flags. Women aren't victims necessarily, but they are casualties of a stale mindset. Look around—so many of the women who succeed do not have young children, elder-care issues or demanding family lives. It is still troubling that certain behaviour by women may be characterized as pushy and aggressive and the same behaviour is viewed as bold and assertive from men. All of this tells us a tale, surely? The Secretary-General has spoken so clearly about his commitment on this front and called for radical change. After all, he has working daughters—I imagine he agrees that the paradigm has to shift. This generation of working women has a lot to offer but they also have huge demands made on them if they are to match their male colleagues—and many are making huge sacrifices to do just that. They should not be struggling in this way. It would be great to see the Secretary-General recognize the managers who institute best practices in their departments when it comes to creating a gender-friendly work environment and actively pursuing the promotion of women and work-life balance—and to see a Hall of Shame for those who don't. ■

## CONGRATULATIONS TO...

**Catherine Pollard of Guyana** who has been appointed Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 3 April 2008. Before her appointment, she was Chief of Staff in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Ms. Pollard has experience in financial, human resource and general administrative management. She has been directly responsible for restructuring the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and of Field Support. She streamlined the budget process while the Director of the Peacekeeping Financing Division in the Department of Management. She was born in Georgetown and holds a Master's Degree in Accounting from the University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica.

**Ms. Angela Kane** (Germany) for her appointment as Under-Secretary-General for Management. She assumed her new position on 1 June 2008. In December 2005, Ms. Kane was named Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. Previous to this, she was Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, Director in the Department of Political Affairs and held a managerial post in the Department of Public Information. In the field, she was Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) and was also posted in Jakarta, Indonesia, and Bangkok, Thailand. She attended university in Munich, Germany, and holds degrees from Bryn Mawr College and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

**Ms. Alicia Bárcena Ibarra** of Mexico who has been appointed Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Formerly the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Management prior to Ms. Kane's appointment, she also served as Deputy Executive Secretary of ECLAC and Chief of the Environment and Human Settlements Division of ECLAC. She was Coordinator of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Adviser to the Latin American and Caribbean Sustainable Development Programme in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Ms. Bárcena Ibarra holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Harvard University.

**Aracelly Santana** who has been appointed Deputy Special Representative for Nepal and Deputy Head of the United Nations Mission In Nepal (UNMIN) on 3 April 2008. At the time of her appointment, Ms. Santana was the Chief of Staff of UNMIN. She assumed her new role on 21 April 2008, replacing Tamrat Samuel. Ms. Santana has worked with the United Nations since 1980. She was responsible for a variety of portfolios in Africa and the Americas in the Department of Political Affairs (DPA). While with the Centre against Apartheid, she organized two missions of the Secretary-General to South Africa in the days before apartheid ended. Ms. Santana was also Deputy Director for the Americas (DPA) and then Officer-in-Charge and Deputy Director of the Electoral Assistance Division (DPA). She has also taken political postings in the Balkans. Ms. Santana has a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Newcomb College, Tulane University in New Orleans and a Master's Degree in Political Economy from the Graduate Faculty—New School for Social Research in New York.

**Ms. Inés Alberdi** who has been assigned Executive Director of UNIFEM. On 8 April 2008, the UNDP Administrator announced the appointment of Ms. Inés Alberdi of Spain as Executive Director of UNIFEM. Ms. Alberdi has extensive experience working with gender, development and politics. She was a Deputy in the Madrid Assembly from 2003 to 2007. She has also served as an expert in the European Union's Equal Opportunities Unit, as the Director of the Research Department in the Spanish Sociological Research Center and as a Senior Adviser at the Inter-American Development Bank. In addition, Ms. Alberdi has published books on the social status of women. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the Compuense University of Madrid.

**Justice Kate O'Regan** (South Africa) who took over as the fifth member and chairperson of the Internal Justice Council, the body established by the General Assembly to assist in building a new system of administration of justice in the United Nations. She worked in South Africa's Constitutional Court in 1994 as a judge, and has served as an attorney and law professor at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the University of South Africa. O'Regan obtained her LLB cum laude from UCT in 1980 and an LLM degree with first class honours from the University of Sydney in 1981. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of London and Honorary Doctorates from the University of Natal of South Africa and UCT.

### **“Letter to staff from the Secretary-General BAN Ki-moon”—28 April 2008, New York**

#### ***Secretary-General asks staff to hold managers accountable on gender balance***

Dear colleagues,

From the day I took office as Secretary-General, I have seen at first hand the contribution women make in every area of our work: peacekeeping, conflict resolution, human rights, management and so many other areas. I am therefore all the more dismayed to see the meager progress so far in reaching the goal of gender balance in the Secretariat. The General Assembly has for many years called for parity at all levels between men and women, yet we are far from achieving it. On the contrary, the statistics tell a story of striking imbalance, with yearly incremental changes that are not nearly at the rate necessary to reach parity within the near future. To give just one example, at current rates of progress, it would take until 2120 to reach gender balance at the P-5 level.

We must do better. Women must be recognized as equal partners in the workplace, as in life. They must enjoy opportunities equal to those of men, and play an equal role in decision-making. The United Nations should be setting an example in this regard.

I have therefore written to all heads of Department and Offices reminding them of their responsibility and asking them to make it a priority to achieve gender balance. I am taking steps to re-energize the system of departmental focal points for women, and will shortly be issuing new and strengthened terms of reference for this important function.

But achieving a gender-balanced Secretariat is not only about numbers. It also requires a shift in organizational culture. It requires us to address issues related to work-life balance, training and career planning. It requires us to build a positive and healthy work environment that is good for men and women. To succeed, we need managers at every level, in every area and of both genders to make this their common mission. I count on all of you to hold them accountable.

Yours sincerely,

**BAN Ki-moon**

- In remarks made by the Deputy Secretary-General Rose Asha-Migiro during the celebration of Staff Day on 25 April 2008, **she mentioned the Secretary-General's commitment to achieve gender equality, to update management methods and to create a healthy work-life balance in the organization:**

“Let me also share with you one important area where the Secretary-General and I have a keen interest, and where we would like to see more concrete action: improving gender balance in the Secretariat. The Secretary-General is committed to lead the effort to improve the situation and achieve the goal of 50:50 parity. He has recently written to all heads of department urging forceful action on their part. But it is not enough to only look at the numbers; we must also embrace modern management methods and foster a healthy work-life balance. This is good for women and for men. And it will ultimately contribute to a more positive and productive working environment.”

- In response to the Secretary General's approval of a new Guidance Note on a **UN Approach to Rule of Law Assistance**, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro said, “... the UN system will greatly benefit from having overarching guiding principles and a policy framework to guide the UN's approach to building rule of law capacities at the national level”.

The Secretary-General issued a Guidance Note on 14 April 2008 on the area of United Nations engagement. One of the guiding principles of the Guidance Note of the Secretary-General: United Nations Approach to Rule of Law Assistance pertains to gender issues: **“Advance human rights and gender justice:** The UN must not overlook the entitlements that have been established under international law for women . . . subjected to marginalization and discrimination in the country. Gender-based discrimination permeates all cultures, and dedicated attention to gender equality issues is needed in all dimensions of rule of law work”.

The framework for strengthening the Rule of Law likewise provides for the equality of men and women. It calls for “a legal framework, and the implementation thereof, consistent with international norms and standards, which protects human rights and provides for effective redress, including laws that establish legal protection for the rights of women on an equal basis with men, and that ensure through competent national tribunals and other public institutions the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination”.

The United Nations and many UN entities engage in rule of law assistance at the national and international levels. This is one of the steps being taken to strengthen the rule of law activities of the United Nations made at the 2005 Summit. The goal is to strengthen international norms and standards and also expand the legal, institutional, societal and cultural environments needed for stability, peace and justice, as well as to reduce poverty and protect human rights in compliance with the rule of law. The Guidance Note provides a framework to the rule of law assistance. Timothy Lemay of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Vienna said that the Guidance Note provides much-needed clarity on the issue of the rule of law.

The purpose of the Guidance Note is to advise senior leadership and highlight the fact that rule of law assistance needs to consider the unique situation in each country and put forth nationally owned rule of law strategies. Yasmine Sherif of UNDP emphasized that the Guidance Note will enable UN entities to improve their rule of law assistance and help create an environment that would contribute to economic and social progress and development.

The Rule of Law Coordination and Resource Group, an inter-agency mechanism consisting of nine UN entities, developed the Guidance Note. The UN Rule of Law Unit, which operates in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, was created to ensure that the United Nations entities engaged in rule of law activities, as well as other entities, and communicate and work together efficiently in order to avoid duplication. Both the Group and the Unit are supported by the General Assembly.

- **The Group on Equal Rights for Women at the United Nations (GERWUN)** is a woman's advocacy group founded in 1971. It started as an ad hoc group in the Secretariat which focused on working for women's equality within the Organization. Through the years, the group has called for the elimination of inequalities between men and women in the United Nations in mutual respect and understanding between men and women<sup>1</sup>. Due to the efforts of this ad hoc group, an **Information Circular on the guidelines for promoting equal treatment of men and women in the Secretariat was issued on 8 March 1979**. On the occasion of Women's Day on 8 March

<sup>1</sup> [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2872/is\\_4\\_26/ai\\_67380610/pg\\_9](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2872/is_4_26/ai_67380610/pg_9)

1979, Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim said that, "I should like to refer now to the information circular on guidelines for promoting equal treatment of men and women in the Secretariat originally proposed by the Ad Hoc Group on Equal Rights for Women, which has been issued today. This is a significant development. In establishing these guidelines, we are going farther than ever before in emphasizing the need for changes in attitude and perceptions, and in spelling out specifically what behaviour is expected of staff members in their relations with their colleagues, be they women or men. We are no longer legislating only in the area of administrative rules and practices. The sphere we hope to regulate with these guidelines is that of human relation, where many of the day-to-day frustrations that affect our colleagues arise".

GERWUN continues to strive for empowerment for women and actions have been taken by the Secretary-General. For example, in 2008, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon requested the Deputy Secretary-General to spearhead the development of a gender balance strategy in the Organization.

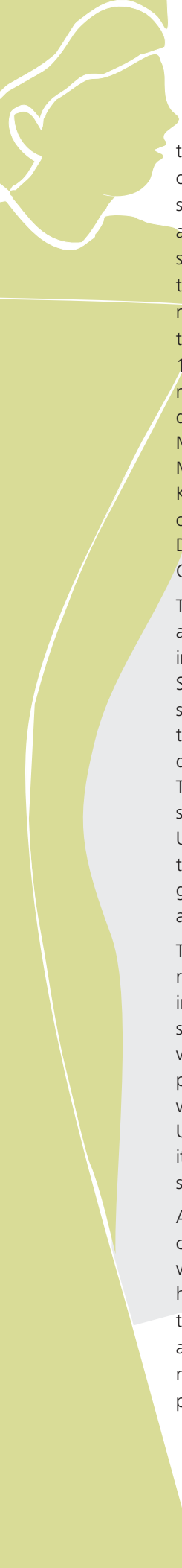
GERWUN launched a membership drive on May 2008 for staff members in the Secretariat, the field and the Funds and Programmes to unite and assist in its continuing goals of gender parity and development of women. The officers of GERWUN who were last elected in September 2007 are:

- President – Ms. Mia B. Jose
- Vice-President – Ms. Barbara Tavora-Jainchill
- Secretary – Ms. Sahar Wanly
- Treasurer – Ms. Cristina Silva
- Equal Time News Editor, Webmaster & Liaison Officer – Ms. Daniela Sinobad

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

- The escalating level of inhumane acts against women and children residing in regions of armed conflicts has caused the Security Council to implement a plan to decrease such crimes. **Resolution 1820 (2008) embodies the Council's objective of ending sexual violence against women and girls**; it specifies





that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide. Many prominent members attended the Security Council meeting adopting resolution 1820. These included Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Secretary of State of the United States Condoleezza Rice; Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro; General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim; Minister for Foreign Affairs of Liberia, Olubanke King-Akerele; and the Former Division Commander of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Retired Major General Patrick Cammart.



The lack of military disciplinary actions and the absence of sanctions against retribution has resulted in widespread sexual abuse of female civilians. Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro said, "Impunity for sexual violence committed during conflict perpetuates a tolerance of abuse against women and girls and leaves a damaging legacy by hindering national reconciliation". The combined efforts of various governments, civil society and non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system, however, are needed to resolve this problem. She considers "women as one of the greatest assets" to battle the crimes against security and sexual violence.

The Security Council, in the text of resolution 1820, requests the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the resolution on various issues such as information on conflict situations where sexual violence was prevalent against civilians, corresponding proposals to reduce the sexual violence inflicted on women and girls, and guidelines and strategies for United Nations peacekeeping operations to improve its effectiveness in protecting women and girls from sexual abuse and violence.

According to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in certain communities the number of crimes related to sexual violence has dramatically increased. In this context, he noted that he will appoint a Messenger of Peace to be responsible for advocacy to protect women and girls from abuse. In addition, he emphasized the need to give more women the chance to engage in peacemaking and peacebuilding.

The Secretary-General reiterated the centrality of protecting women and girls from sexual violence as a way not only to carry out the UN's humanitarian goal but also as a means to reinstate the economic and social stability that the conflicting nations have lost.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who chaired the debate on behalf of the United States, noted that with the adoption of resolution 1820, the Security Council has now recognized that sexual abuse against women is definitely a security concern.



Furthermore, she stated that "we affirm that sexual violence profoundly affects not only the health and safety of women, but the economic and social stability of their nations".

- The UN Mission in Liberia and the Government of Liberia organized a nationwide campaign against rape. The campaign, which calls on all Liberians to say "No to Rape", visited Buchanan, Liberia's second largest city. UN Envoy, Ms. Ellen Margrethe Løj, said that, "If things are going to change in Liberia, it has to be the Liberians talking about it. It has to be responsible people in government and local administration taking ownership and dealing with it. **It has to be young men and women, elders and community leaders, school teachers and everyone working to prevent rape. Only then can we stop rape in Liberia**".

Ms. Julia Duncan-Cassell, the County Superintendent, called on civil society organizations and religious bodies to highlight the seriousness of rape. She asked all men present to take a pledge not to engage in or facilitate rape. Rev. Dr. Laurence Bropleh, Liberia's Minister for Information, Culture and Tourism, told those attending about one of his childhood friends whose dreams were destroyed because she was raped. **He asked all men in Liberia to help make sure that today's girls and women are treated respectfully.** Ms. Patricia Kamara, Assistant Minister of Gender, gave statistics on the number of reported rape cases. In the first two months of 2008, there were 197 reported rapes; 17 of the victims were under age five.

- Soledad Jarquin Edgar, a Mexican editor and reporter, focuses on domestic violence against Mexican women in her stories in *Las Carcolas*, a supplement to *El Imparcial*, a major Oaxacan paper. Oaxaca is Mexico's second poorest state and has the second highest rate



of domestic violence and homicide against women in Mexico. She started writing about various women's issues in 1998 when she observed that women were not covered in the news media. On the front page of the paper, she headlines profiles of women who have been victims of domestic violence. She won Mexico's National Journalism Prize for a story she wrote about women raped by Mexican soldiers. She and other journalists and women advocates wrote the book *Voices of Bravery in Oaxaca: Violations of the Rights of Women in Social and Political Conflict*. Among other things, it describes government inaction with respect to abuses against women, and reflects on how gender violence increases during political crisis. **Jarquín Edgar writes descriptively and movingly about the pain of women faced with violence and abuse, describing the reality without avoiding the details of the crimes.** ■

## AROUND THE WORLD

- **Many Egyptian women face issues such as poverty, illiteracy, harassment, female circumcision and sexual abuse.** A project named "Bussy" (named after the Arabic command LOOK!), created by playwrights-turned-anthropologists, depicted Egyptian women's issues by transforming interviews with women into monologues for a play. The project searched for women who wanted their voices heard. As one of the directors said, "We felt like our region was mostly ignored". Another director felt that watching it in the audience gave her the sentiment that she was not alone in her daily conflicts with harassment and gender issues.
- The Asia Foundation is a non-profit, non-governmental organization based in San Francisco, California, which works for the development of a peaceful, prosperous, fair and open Asia-Pacific region, improving opportunities for women and girls, particularly in post-Taliban Afghanistan. On 28 May 2008, the Foundation received its third grant from the National Geographic Society to continue its goal in supporting the Rabia-e-Balkhi Girls High School and Resource Center in Kabul, Afghanistan. The Asia Foundation recently conducted a study on illiteracy of women in Afghanistan. **A press release stated that 80 per cent of Afghan women are illiterate.**
- The Foundation has rebuilt fourteen **classrooms**, and established five **science labs** at Rabia-e-Balkhi. It also built a **library** and a **resource centre** equipped with a computer lab. The new grant received from the National Geographic Society will be used to provide **better infrastructure in the school**, such as safe drinking water and better sanitation for the female students.
- Princess Madawi Bing Mohammad Bin Abdullah, the chairperson of the board of partners of women of the Luthan hotel and spa, obtained approval from the Secretary General of the Saudi Tourism Commission to open the Luthan hotel and spa. **The luxurious urban retreat is located in the northern part of Riyadh and will exclusively accommodate women. It is the very first of its kind in the Gulf area.** The hotel contains 25 rooms and is equipped with a restaurant, a conference room, a spa and modern amenities. Saudi businesswomen always need to get proper authorization when they travel in the country before they can check into "mixed" hotels. Women may check into this hotel, however, without permits.
- Hajiya Saudatu Bungudu, who heads the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in Nigeria, is committed to assist women in the agricultural sector to overcome the food crisis in the country. The ministry will see to it that **women will be integrated into the national economy** to help alleviate their poverty through jobs in food processing and in the agriculture areas.
- On 13 April 2008, a group of women leaders from government, faith-based organizations, advocacy groups and Hollywood initiated the launching of a **global poverty fight to assist impoverished women and girls**. Fund-raising commitments of \$1,481 billion have been collected by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright, Queen Noor of Jordan, Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, and the Women, Faith and Development Alliance (WFDA). The UN Population Fund also made a \$500 million pledge over several years to help end the problems of maternal mortality and violence against women.
- Spiegel Online International reported on 9 June 2008 that European Union Social Commissioner Vladimir Spidla told the German newspaper *Die Welt* that **in Germany women earn far less than men**. The average wage gap between men and women in the



European Union is 15 per cent. In Germany, however, women earn 22 per cent less than men according to a newly released European Union study. **Most women in Germany are part-time workers because of their roles as caretakers of their children and elderly relatives.** The EU Commissioner drew the attention of employers to be fair in the wages of both men and women as this would increase productivity and motivation of the workforce. ■

## IN YOUR INTEREST...

- **An article entitled “Boys and girls come out to work” from the 1 May 2008 *Financial Times* mentioned that Microsoft employs a higher proportion of women in the technology field than other IT companies.** Victoria Yates, who started as a trainee in Microsoft two years ago, won the best product presentation at the competition in Redmond, Washington, in May 2008. A review made by the Trendence Institute Graduate Recruitment Review 2008 revealed that women students have rated BBC as the most attractive employer, while male students said Google topped the list. Female students who are about to complete their university studies are likely to favour employment in the public sector. On the other hand, men preferred the tech companies, or banking and investment. According to the study, **women students tend to give more importance to work-life balance and job security.**
- **“Hear no evil, see no evil” (summary of an article by Neil Baker, April 2008, *Internal Auditor*).** Effective whistleblower programmes encourage employees to speak out rather than look the other way. Société Générale in France lost \$7.6 billion dollars because of one of its traders, discovering it only after the bank had been warned about his behaviour. In the United States, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act in 2002 requires publicly traded companies to have whistleblower programmes in place. Companies all over the world have set up similar whistleblowing procedures as well but with their execution tailored to local situations. Many experts suggest that the term “whistleblower” not be used as people feel that, if they blow the whistle, they will face retribution. Molson Coors Brewing therefore calls it their “inquiry and reporting system”. Another UK company where he worked at first called their policy “Speaking Up” and then changed it to “Talk Openly” as it translated well into multiple languages. Some companies run their programme in-house and some hire an external third party to run their programme. Neither method is inherently better. It all depends on where the employee will feel more protected or anonymous. In some countries with authoritarian governments, for instance, employees would never feel sure about who they were contacting if they had to call or email an outside third party. **A prerequisite for these programmes to work is a feeling employees must know and trust that that they are protected from retribution, and their comments are confidential, and that the tips they provide are acted upon.**
- An article from *The New York Times* on 22 June 2008 entitled, **“For a good retirement, find work. Good luck”** by Steve Lohr stated that working beyond the average retirement age is believed to contribute about \$13 trillion dollars to the economy by 2025 according to a research group, the McKinsey Global Institute. In addition, working beyond the average retirement age of 63 for men and 62 for women has the benefit of increasing tax collections, lowering the financial pressure on Social Security and Medicare and improving household savings. However, older people have more difficulty getting a job because of the commonly held perspective that older workers are “less energetic, less productive, less adaptable and more likely to have outdated skills than younger workers”. One survey showed that a quarter of the companies were not disposed to hiring older employees. There is also the belief that the number of workers would decrease as the baby boomers retire, which may allow a greater number of older workers to find job opportunities. Various proposals have been put forward to address the disinclination towards hiring older workers. First, companies can be exempted from paying for Social Security and Medicare after their employees have worked for 40 years. Second, Medicare can take the responsibility of affording people’s health-care costs once they pass 65 years of age. Third, the age of eligibility for Social Security can be increased to 64 or 65 from 62, as it is now. ■

## WOMEN'S HEALTH

- **The 2008 High-Level Meeting on AIDS** was held in the United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on 10-11 June 2008. According to a press release, **“women represent half of the global**

**population of adults infected with HIV, 61 per cent of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa”.**

The Report of the Secretary-General, Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: Midway to the Millennium Development Goals (A/62/780 of 1 April 2008) notes the following with respect to women:

- The percentage of HIV-infected pregnant women receiving antiretrovirals increased from 14 per cent in 2005 to 34 per cent in 2007.
- More than 80 per cent of countries have policies to ensure the equal access of women to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. However, only 53 per cent of the countries have a budget for women’s programmes.
- Goal 6 of the Millennium Development Goals, to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, is linked to the achievement of Goal 3, which is to empower women and promote gender equality.
- Member States are committed to inform young people about HIV/AIDS. However, young women worldwide have been systematically found to be less informed than young men about HIV/AIDS.
- Boys are more likely to have sex before the age 15 except in sub-Saharan Africa where girls under 15 are approximately 50 per cent more likely to be sexually active than their males peers.
- Only 6 per cent of women worldwide compared to 15 per cent of men between ages of 15-49 had sex with more than one partner in the last 12 months.
- Preventive measures have been undertaken by some countries to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission. The global coverage of this measure has increased from 14 per cent in 2005 to 34 per cent in 2007.
- Currently women constitute 61 per cent of HIV-infected adults in sub-Saharan Africa. The infection rate for adolescent girls is much higher than for boys their age.
- “Policies that provide for women’s equal access to services are sometimes undermined by the lack of laws recognizing the right of women to own or inherit property. While such discriminatory legal frameworks have particular importance for women who are widowed as a result of HIV, they disempower all women and girls by increasing their financial dependence on men”.

- Breast cancer is one of the **most common cancers in women worldwide**. Three studies made by the National Cancer Institute in the United States ([www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)) involving 184,000 women revealed that **drinking of alcohol in post menopausal women increases the risk of developing breast cancer**, regardless of the type or quantity of alcohol consumed. Alcohol increases estrogen metabolites, which can trigger hormone-sensitive breast cancer. The risk of developing a hormone-sensitive tumor was 32 per cent higher for those women who took one to two drinks per day. The increase was 51 per cent for those drinking three or more drinks. The lab studies state that “The majority of tumors—70 per cent—are classified as positive for estrogen and progesterone receptors, explaining why hormone replacement therapy (HRT) has been linked to breast cancer”.

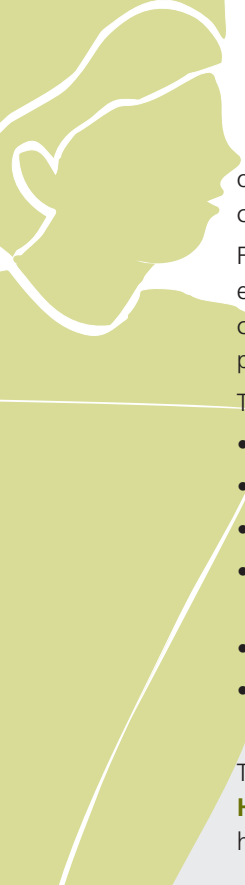
• **DIABETES, WOMEN & DEVELOPMENT**  
**Summary by Jaana Vilberg, Intern, OPFW**

*As a follow up to General Assembly resolution 61/225, “World Diabetes Day” an expert group meeting on Diabetes, Women and Development was held on 8 April 2008. The aim of the meeting was to spotlight the adverse relationship between diabetes and women’s health and well-being and to influence the public community to incorporate critical gender equality concerns into international protocols.*

The number of people with diabetes is increasing worldwide, in developed and developing countries. This fact, in conjunction with the rising prevalence of obesity and impaired glucose tolerance, means that gradually more pregnancies are associated with diabetes. The reported prevalence of the disease during pregnancy varies between 3 to 15 per cent of pregnancies. In addition, studies indicate that children born to mothers with diabetes during pregnancy suffer an increased risk of diabetes.

Furthermore, in general, women are affected by diabetes more than men because of different biological, cultural and socio-economic circumstances, including having more limited access to health-care facilities.

The increased rate of diabetes in the world has more far-reaching implications than individual health. Uncontrolled diabetes causes fatigue and restricts the ability to work, thereby reducing productivity. Women with diabetes also face more discrimination at jobs (higher rates of job loss) and at home (higher rates



of divorce and separation, many times without any compensation or support).

Furthermore, a good proportion of diabetes cases, especially gestational diabetes, could be adequately controlled with dietary modifications and increased physical activity.

The expert group recommended:

- Investment in the health and nutrition of the girl child;
- A life-cycle approach to prevent diabetes;
- Provision of maternal and child health programs;
- Care for diabetes during the pregnancy through community screening;
- Enhancement of maternal nutrition; and
- Increased awareness of diabetes at all levels of society, particularly for women living in the rural areas.

The expert group also suggested the slogan “**Women’s Health is a Nation’s Wealth**” to promote women’s health worldwide. ■

## RECOMMENDED READING / DVD

<http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B258workplaceflex.pdf>

A review of the statutory employment rights in 21 high-income countries, including the United States, was made by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) and the Center for Worklife Law at the University of California Hastings College of the Law. The IWPR report contends that the quality of work life will improve, the economy will grow and gender equality will be fostered if opportunities for workers are created to change their work arrangements in order to achieve work-life balance and to facilitate long-term learning and gradual retirement.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/fpgenderpolicies.htm>

This is the Office of the Focal Point for Women’s compilation of gender-relevant policies in the United

Nations. When fully implemented, these policies could help create an organizational culture more conducive to equal representation and participation of men and women.

## DVD

### **Iron Ladies of Liberia**

(<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/ironladies/>)

A documentation of the presidency of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia, the first female president elected to lead an African nation, and the “Iron Ladies” in her cabinet. The DVD is available from [www.ironladiesofliberia.com](http://www.ironladiesofliberia.com), directed by Danie Junge and Siatta Scott Johnson.

### **Beyond Belief**

(<http://www.principlepictures.com/beyondbelief/>)

Two Boston widows whose husbands were killed on 11 September by terrorists trained in Afghanistan traveled to that war-torn country to connect with women like themselves—women who have become sole breadwinners for the family due to the hardships of war. The two women empowered 400 widows by donating 15 chickens each to the Afghan women so that they can earn a living and help their children. The director, Beth Murphy, follows these widows during their travels and experiences in Afghanistan.

## WEBSITES

<http://www.womendeliver.org/index.htm>

This web portal aims to give information and current news on events, partnerships and networks related to maternal and child health. Personal stories of real women around the world are related on the site to illustrate how targeted investments can save the lives of mothers and newborn children worldwide.

<http://www.imow.org/home/index>

The website of the International Museum of Women, which features online exhibitions, history, arts and cultural activities, aims to advance global gender equality and educate and communicate to the community.

## INFO

You can find a monthly list of senior vacancy announcements (P-5 and above) at  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/>

You can read Network online at  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/Network>

To receive hard copies of Network, please send an e-mail request to [network-newsletter@un.org](mailto:network-newsletter@un.org)

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