

UN Women Executive Board, annual meeting, 17-19 June 2014

Agenda item 2: Strategic Plan

Statement by Ireland.

Thank you for giving me the floor, Mr. President.

We know that today millions of women and girls still suffer high levels of inequality in accessing economic opportunities, and basic services such as education and health. Women's participation in public life continues to be curtailed by laws and traditional practices and violence against women remains an unacceptably pervasive human rights violation in many countries.

Despite this solemn picture, there is also promising progress towards gender equality, as highlighted in the Executive Director's report. We would like to congratulate UN Women for the impressive results achieved this past year. An organisation only in its third year of operation should be proud of its achievements, empowered and motivated to do even more in the years ahead.

The change of leadership that took place last year would have been challenging in normal circumstances; but to your credit, Executive Director, and that of UN Women, the momentum continues.

So many results and outputs stand out from this well-crafted report and so little time is available today that I will limit myself to four key issues:

Global advocacy and leadership

It is difficult to believe that such effective advocacy to improve the lives of women and girls could have been accomplished without UN Women. A measure of the achievement of this young organisation has been its ability to make the case and persuade so many people of the importance of this basic human right in such a short time.

Gender equality and women's empowerment is a top priority for Ireland, both in our overseas development programme and for the post 2015 process. Not only as a standalone goal but also as an important dimension for other goals such as food and nutrition security and ending hunger, achieving peaceful and inclusive societies, for the rule of law and effective and capable institutions.

An important first step in addressing gender inequality is recognising it, by closing the gaps in data and in our understanding of the different experiences and states of wellbeing for women and men, girls and boys.

In this regard, we commend UN Women for its partnerships and joint work with the UN Statistical Commission, including the EDGE project which Ireland supports, to develop indicators to measure key aspects of the lives of women and girls and to build capacity in the collection and analysis of this data. Recent joint initiatives to support the development of baselines on ending violence against women are particularly welcome.

Ending violence against women

Ireland recognises that violence against women is one of the most pervasive and yet least recognised human rights abuses in the world. It is a manifestation of gross inequality and discrimination and perpetuates situations of poverty for individual women, their families and whole societies.

The UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women is a key initiative garnering international and national attention for the prevention of violence against women and girls, families and whole societies, but also strengthening multi-sectoral responses.

Ireland has adopted a similar approach, through working with Irish human rights, humanitarian and development organisations, and the Defence Forces, to promote a coherent and coordinated response to gender based violence, as members of the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence,

Women, Peace and Security

We welcome the dynamic leadership of UN Women on the women, peace and security agenda. Your efforts to empower women and support their participation in peace and security processes continue to grow. However, as the annual report acknowledges, despite real gains women's participation in formal peace processes remains inadequate.

This year the development of a Global Study on 1325 offers an excellent opportunity to capture and share best practices that will help us to tackle ongoing challenges on this issue. We look forward to providing support to this important Global Study.

For our own part, we are currently developing our second National Action Plan on 1325. Building on our first NAP, our second Plan will pay increased attention to women's participation and leadership and to the potential role women can play in the peace process in Northern Ireland. We will be happy to share the lessons we have learned so far with the team conducting the Global Study.

We are also keenly aware of the encouragement and support that UN Women has provided to women-led civil society organisations working on the ground to make a real difference in increasing women's leadership development and full participation in all levels of decision-making.

The work of Special Envoy Mary Robinson is ground-breaking. Her conscious ambition is to build a sustainable constituency for change, including women's groups and civil society. A constituency that will continue to insist the political importance of promoting women's participation and preventing sexual violence and that will continue to hold governments accountable for their commitments. We have been happy to support Mary Robinson's Office and look forward to supporting the Great Lakes Women's Platform of civil society organisations.

Humanitarian action

Ireland, and a number of other countries from all regions, has been suggesting that UN Women could add value to humanitarian action. While accepting that the organisation has had limited

engagement or capacity in this area, we continue to believe that the humanitarian crises are badly in need of a UN body which ensures that the interests of women and girls are really taken seriously.

We are pleased to see a new strategy. We consider that it can be strengthened by underlining UN Women's comparative advantages and how coordination, particularly at field level, might best be facilitated.

Conclusion

We fully agree with the annual report's conclusion that UN Women, with its unique position in the UN system, is one of the few organisations which come close to be described as "fit for purpose", a continued reminder of the need for UN reform, as we prepare to agree a new development agenda next year and then act on it in subsequent years.

High expectations, commitments not matching resources, resistance to the normative agenda will continue to provide challenges.

However, opportunities also present themselves as we renew commitment and strengthen action in celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Conference and finalise the new development agenda.

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