

Response to Coherence Panel Recommendations on UN Reform
Statement by June Zeitlin, Executive Director
of the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)
Presented at the Press Briefing on the high-level panel's recommendations
to the UN Secretary General
9 November 2006

We are very pleased that one of the Panel's boldest recommendations is for an independent women's agency that will strengthen the UN's capacity, leadership and resources on gender equality and women's empowerment. As we told the Panel members, there is a tremendous gap between the promises and rhetoric at the UN on gender equality, and the reality--in terms of leadership, program implementation and resources---and the lack of results for women on the ground. We believe that this consolidated women's agency, along with greater accountability for gender equality throughout the UN system, will increase the UN's effectiveness at both the global and country level s in promoting peace, securing human rights and advancing development.

I want to address two key issues related to the effective implementation of the Panel's recommendations--the leadership of the consolidated women's entity and the funding. In terms of leadership, the report recommends that the new entity be headed by an Under Secretary-General, which is comparable to leaders of other funds and programmes, and a higher status than any of the existing women's units. It also specifically calls for "a meritocratic competition open to those outside the UN and an open and transparent global search process." The creation of the new USG post must go hand in hand with the creation of the consolidated structure with a dual mandate. This person must function both as a chief advisor to the Secretary-General and the chief policy and programmatic leader on gender equality and women's empowerment across the UN system. It is essential that this person have demonstrated experience on gender equality and women's human rights. Identifying the right leader for this agency is critical for its success. Women's groups around the world stand ready to help the new Secretary-General identify talented individuals to be considered in the global search process.

Let me turn to the issue of funding for this agency. I want to begin by noting that current funding for UNIFEM, the existing UN agency with specific programmatic responsibilities on gender equality, is in the \$50 million range. Obviously, this falls far short of the well-documented need, even including funds allocated by other UN agencies for gender equality work. The Panel understood that a major increase in funding was essential for achieving effective results and calls for the new agency to "be fully and ambitiously funded." Let me tell you what that means to us. In earlier drafts of the report, the Panel recommended an initial target of \$200 million for the women's agency. We understand that this number was taken out because some Panel members believed that it was far below what was needed for the UN to deliver on gender equality and women's empowerment. We agree that \$200 million was only a beginning. Therefore, women's groups around the world will be undertaking a campaign, particularly among the donor countries, to commit far more than \$200 million for the work of the consolidated agency. We look forward particularly to the leadership and early commitment of the many donor countries who were represented on the Panel.

An important first step has been taken with the Panel's report. Now it is up to the member states and the General Assembly, with the leadership of the Honorable Haya Al-Khalifa, only the third woman to preside over the General Assembly, to deliver on UN reform for the women of the world.