

**Brief Overview:  
United Nations  
Gender Architecture Reform**

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**Reforming the Gender Architecture in the UN system**

**Background:**

The 2005 World Summit Outcome Document amongst other proposals called for stronger system-wide coherence across the various agencies, funds, and programmes of the United Nations (UN) and invited the Secretary-General (SG) to “strengthen the management and coordination of UN operational activities”<sup>1</sup>. Following this, the SG established a High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence (in short ‘Coherence Panel’) in the fields of *Humanitarian Assistance, Development and Environment*. The 15 member Coherence Panel, of which only three are women, was mandated to make recommendations on how the UN should be structured, both at the country and global levels; address new challenges; and discuss how the UN system can meet goals such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Critical of the composition of the Coherence Panel, women’s groups addressed an Open Letter to the SG and Member States<sup>2</sup> deploring the lack of gender balance on the Coherence Panel and the absence of gender equality concerns in the mandate. In response to the criticism, the SG expanded the mandate of the Coherence Panel to include both gender equality architecture and gender mainstreaming, and has made gender equality a cross-cutting issue for all three fields.

IWRAW Asia Pacific has been supporting the advocacy work of the Centre for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL) and Women’s Development and Environment Organisation (WEDO) with the Coherence Panel on gender architecture and gender mainstreaming in the UN. This article will focus on the Coherence Panel.

**Gender architecture and gender mainstreaming:**

Women’s groups across the globe have repeatedly maintained that gender mainstreaming within the UN has not been achieved or implemented systematically and effectively<sup>3</sup>. Inadequate resources, lack of accountability, lack of authority to implement policies or proper training is some of the difficulties faced during gender mainstreaming. Currently, there are several agencies<sup>4</sup> focussing exclusively on women’s issues that are under-resourced.

One way of resolving these inadequacies is to have an independent, women-specific agency with adequate stature, resources, operational capacity and a mandate to drive their agenda. Some proposals have been put-forward by States and NGOs on creating an independent

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<sup>1</sup> UN Doc A/RES/60/1

<sup>2</sup> The letter can be found at <[http://www.wedo.org/library, www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/unadvocacy/index.html](http://www.wedo.org/library/www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/unadvocacy/index.html)>

<sup>3</sup> See UNIFEM Assessment: UN Doc A/60/62 – E2005/10; UNDP Evaluation of Gender mainstreaming, at [www.undp.org/eo/documents/EO\\_GenderMainstreaming.pdf](http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/EO_GenderMainstreaming.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Secretary-General’s Special Advisor on Gender Issues (OSAGI) and the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)

agency, (i) the government of Netherlands proposed the merger of UNIFEM and UNDP; (ii) some NGOs proposed the merger of UNIFEM/INSTRAW/DAW/OSAGI into one or two agencies, one operational and the other policymaking; (iii) another proposal was the creation of a new independent women's agency with a broad mandate, led by an Under-Secretary General and with enhanced resources - this agency could be built by combining UNIFEM and UNFPA field and headquarters staff, by significantly scaling up UNIFEM, or by creating an entirely new independent agency. The first two options were not considered by most NGOs and they supported the third one, which was felt to have the potential for becoming an independent and strong women's agency.

CWGL and WEDO submitted a proposal<sup>5</sup> to the Coherence Panel, which laid down the framework, functions and characteristics of the new women-specific entity. The proposal sought the creation of a 'well-resourced, independent women's entity that would have normative, operational and oversight capacity, and universal country presence'. It also sought an Under Secretary General with substantive expertise in gender equality to lead the women's entity. Several<sup>6</sup> global, regional and local organizations and networks including IRAW Asia Pacific endorsed the proposal that was submitted to the Coherence Panel. Emphasis<sup>7</sup> was made on the dual mandate of the new entity – normative and operational capacities before the Coherence Panel, which met in Oslo on 30 –31 August 2006. The Coherence Panel reached an agreement, now called the "Oslo Consensus" where they recommend for the establishment of a better resourced, independent women-specific entity, combining OSAGI, DAW and UNIFEM, having both normative and operational responsibilities and to be led by an Under-Secretary General.

The Coherence Panel presented its final report on 9 November 2006 to the Secretary General, who transmitted it to the General Assembly. The General Assembly is expected to review and debate the Coherence Panel's recommendations in early 2007. Presently the report is being translated so that it can be reviewed closely by member states<sup>8</sup>. The Secretary-General Kofi Annan initiated some moves to "fast-track" some of the recommendations of the Coherence Panel report, specifically the creation of a new Under-Secretary General position to head the new women's agency. His proposal was to create the position by the end of 2006, with the idea that in 2007, the incoming Secretary General Ban Ki Moon would appoint the new Under-Secretary General. There was opposition to this "fast-track" initiative especially from the G77 countries and the move has been scuttled.

It now appears that we will enter into a long inter-governmental process next year, and a lot of work remains to be done to ensure that the gender equality recommendations go forward and are not weakened during that stage.

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<sup>5</sup> Gender Equality Architecture and UN Reforms, available at: <<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/unadvocacy/Gender%20Equality%20Architecture%20and%20UN%20Reforms%20July%202006.pdf>>

<sup>6</sup> 114 in number

<sup>7</sup> Fact Sheet on Reforming the Gender Architecture in the UN System, submitted by CWGL and WEDO, available at: <<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/unadvocacy/UNReformFactSheet0806.pdf>>

<sup>8</sup> Coherence Panel, available at: <<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/unadvocacy/index.html#Coherence>>