



STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAM SEN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE,  
AT THE INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS OF THE PLENARY ON THE UN  
HIGH LEVEL PANEL REPORT: '**GENDER ENTITY**' ON  
21 JUNE 2007

Mr. Co-Chair,

We thank you for organizing the informal consultations on this very important issue. We are grateful to the Secretary-General for sharing his views with us.

We agree with the HLP report when it says that the importance of achieving gender equality cannot be overstated. We also agree on the need for the UN to pursue the objectives of gender equality and women's empowerment far more vigorously. We are less sure of its assessment that the UN system's contribution has been incoherent, under-resourced and fragmented. Under-resourced, yes, incoherent, perhaps, and fragmented, may be.

Mahatma Gandhi once said that a "woman has the right to participate in the very minutest detail in the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him." As we chart the future course for the UN on gender equality and women's empowerment, we would like to measure the proposals on their ability to assist the efforts of countries towards achieving the vision of gender equality articulated by the Mahatma over seventy years ago. In a more specifically economic context, the Indian Nobel prize winning economist Amartya Sen has demonstrated the impact of gender on general economic development. However, this is entirely different from trying to make it a conditionality.

The Panel's recommendations arise out of the overall thesis that coherence and consolidation can achieve results. A vision of gender equality and women's empowerment that brings to women the freedom and liberty equal to man is a big dream. It involves action on multiple fronts and achievements in a number of areas ranging from

health care, including reproductive health, education to women's rights. Can this be done by a single voice, no matter how powerful it might be? A strong voice can help, but for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, strong effort would be needed on multiple fronts. Perhaps some fragmentation in the sense of plurality is necessary to confront an issue whose footprints can be found in such multiple areas.

Mr. Co-Chair,

We can support the Panel's recommendations for a higher level representative for women. An Under-Secretary General would have the appropriate status for participating in the CEB meetings. Simultaneously, however, we would wish to see the work of individual funds and programmes strengthened in their respective areas or mandates. This includes UNIFEM. We are not sure of the impact of a merger of the Secretariat bodies that would inevitably have more of a normative role, with UNIFEM, which has an operational mandate. We are also unsure of how the work of individual agencies would be strengthened by the creation of a gender entity focused mainly on policy advice, advocacy and monitoring but also trying to combine this with an operational and technical role. While monitoring of commitments is equally applicable to both developed and developing countries, advocacy and policy advice should not represent an upstream shift at the cost of technical support at the ground level. We have to bear in mind the needs of developing countries for grass roots support for innovative and appropriate technical assistance. This would require upgrading the technical capacity of the agencies themselves. The recommendations of the HLP report have not focused adequately on these dimensions.

GA resolution 59/250 (TCPR) provides a clear mandate for strengthening of gender in the work of the funds and programmes. It provides guidance for enhancing the effectiveness of gender specialist resources, gender focal points and theme groups. TCPR calls for UN development system to avail itself of the technical experience of UNIFEM on gender issues. We believe there is need to examine the recommendations of the Panel with the guidance provided by TCPR, as in some areas the recommendations of TCPR are stronger than those of the HLP report. In recent years, some agencies have been making considerable efforts in this direction. While UNICEF and UNFPA already have a strong gender focus, UNDP too has made efforts over the last few years to improve its gender focus. We would need to examine the ongoing work in individual funds and programmes on gender to

understand where and what kind of action is called for. Perhaps a system-wide evaluation of the UN development system on gender equality and women's empowerment would provide us better guidance.

Mr. Co-Chair,

As we said earlier, one crucial issue that has hampered the efforts of the UN development system to provide support to countries is inadequate funding. We believe that a strong push for gender needs strong resources, and not only new centralized, extensive bureaucratic structures. HLP report itself states that too often, "reform" has meant adding extra layers of bureaucracy, outweighing potential benefits. We would like to bring about real progress on an issue of such crucial importance; not just something that is symbolic but substantial, concrete and wide ranging progress on the ground and throughout the UN system, encompassing inter alia the programmes and agencies.

Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair.

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