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Letter from the Focal Point for Women in the Secretariat

Dear Colleagues,

There are few activities that are more suitable for women than conflict prevention, peacemaking, and reconstruction. Throughout the world, women are not only suffering the consequences of war but dealing with the challenges of managing a family where the father has either gone to war or lost his life through war, and bear the heavy responsibility of re-establishing family and civil society after the devastation of war.

Despite this overwhelming role, women have been marginalised and, in some cases, excluded from decision-making in the peace processes. The absence of women's perspectives -- through their experience and knowledge -- damages the process of peacemaking, casts doubts on the fairness of peace negotiations, and makes it unlikely that sustainable or truly democratic peace will be achieved.

This issue of *Network* is dedicated to the women who, against all odds, are making every attempt to exert influence and introduce balance to the peacemaking processes. These women are actively involved as peacekeepers or staff supporting objectives of field missions. "Women Uniting for Peace" was the theme of the recent International Women's Day celebration on the 8th of March. This issue of *Network* reports on the keynote speakers for this event. We also point out issues concerning sexual harassment in the field with some practical ways that both staff and managers can deal with these situations.

Those of you who are involved in this important work, we fully support you and praise your efforts. Please don't lose sight of your objectives -- to make the world a better and more stable place for all -- women, children, and men. We salute you!

Zohreh Tabatabai

Around the UN

International Women's Day

The International Women's Day was celebrated this year with the theme "Women Uniting for Peace" focusing on the role of women as peacemakers. DPI Under-Secretary-General Mr. Kensaku Hogen presided over the town hall meeting that took place at Headquarters in the morning. Non-governmental organizations from all over the world took part in the discussion following the statements of the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council, and Ms. Mary Robinson. The meeting was followed by a luncheon organized by the Group on Equal Rights and it was attended by all the women Permanent Representatives and senior management. In the afternoon a panel discussion was held for women staff members on the status women in the Secretariat with Ms. Carolyn McAskie, Deputy to the USG/OCHA, Mr. Hedi Annabi, ASG/DPKO, Ms. Rafiah Salim, ASG/OHRM, Ms. Zohreh Tabatabai, Focal Point for Women in the UN, and Ms. Marcia Brewster, President, Group on Equal Rights participating with Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Louise Fréchette acting as moderator.

The Secretary-General in his Women's Day statement said that the UN had made special efforts to recruit women for peacekeeping missions and to make all the Organization's operations more aware of gender issues. Several missions – including those in Afghanistan, Kosovo and East Timor – now include civilian gender affairs units. The Secretary-General then appealed to Member States to include qualified women in the contingents they send, and to nominate qualified women candidates for posts at all levels.

Mr. Anwarul Chowdhury, President of the Security Council issued a statement for the first time on the occasion of Women's Day. He said that the Council was becoming aware of the need to take a more pro-active role to protect women and to harness their potential as peace builders. Also the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Mary Robinson, addressed the town hall meeting. She said that it is especially important that women play a central role in the resolution of conflicts. "Peace negotiation and post conflict reconstruction must involve women, both as representatives of the State but also of civil society. The international agencies must take into account women's experience and need in their assessments and subsequent programming."

Along with this year's theme, the UN Fund for Women (UNIFEM) launched on 1 March a publication entitled "Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference". The publication tells the stories of women's participation in peace negotiations in many regions of the world. In the panel discussion following the launching, Ms. Hanan Ashrawi, Director of the Palestinian

Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, Mrs. Mary Brownell, Director of the Liberian Women's Initiative and Mrs. Piedad Cordoba Ruiz, Senator in Colombia, presented their views and experiences of women's participation in peace negotiations.

In addition to Headquarters, UNOG and other UN offices around the world, UNESCO celebrated the International Women's Day as the day that "women make the news". In their efforts to give more possibilities for women journalists to rise to key editorial positions in the media, media outlets ranging from CBS News to Azerbaijan, Senegal and the UK participated in the event placed women journalists in charge of the news for the day.

Commission on the Status of Women prepared for Beijing +5

The 44th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) convened from 28 February to 2 March in New York. The session was followed by CSW acting as the preparatory committee (3 to 17 March) for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" to be held in New York 5-9 June 2000.

At the 44th session, the Commission discussed the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women: a) review of mainstreaming in organizations of the United Nations system; b) emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between men and women; and c) implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern. The meeting also discussed the comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action.

In your interest

The Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (IACWGE) chaired by Ms. Angela E. V. King, met for its fifth session in New York, 23-25 February 2000. During the three-day meeting the Committee discussed topics such as the gender focal point study, collection of good practices, gender mainstreaming in programme budgets and the compilation of gender training materials. The Committee was particularly pleased with the web site WomenWatch and welcomed its continuation beyond the General Assembly special session in June.

On the last day of the meeting a special item was added to agenda to discuss the status of women in the Secretariat. The Vice-Chairperson of CCAQ (Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions), Ms. Jan Beagle briefed the Committee on the work of CCAQ and its efforts to raise human resources management issues to the attention of the highest levels of management; its work with organizations on reforms of human resources

policies and work-family issues. CCAQ will make all efforts to ensure that the advancement of women was a policy priority in the organizations of the system and included as an integral part of the human resources reform from the outset. Some of the efforts under way address work and family life issues such as flexitime, reduced work schedules, flexiplace/home-based work, spouse employment, and family leave. The Focal Point for Women, Ms. Zohreh Tabatabai briefed the Committee on recent developments.

The next meeting of IACWGE will take place in New York in February-March, 2001. The provisional agenda includes diversity issues in human resources management.

Quote

"I have yet to hear a man ask for advice on how to combine marriage and a career."

- Gloria Steinem

Network to the Top

Network is glad to present to you the interview of Ms. Catherine Bertini who became the first woman to head the United Nations World Food Programme in April 1992. In 1996, she was named one of the "World's Most Powerful Women" by the Times of London.

Q: What do you see as the main obstacles to women's career advancement in a male-dominated organization?

A: There are many obstacles facing women in many organizations, and the most sensitive and controversial of these are related to gender. We cannot assume that a system is bias-proof simply because anti-discrimination clauses have been inserted into labour laws and corporate codes of conduct. The clauses on their own do not remove the obstacles, it is the leadership in the organization that does so. Nor can we assume that because career development opportunities exist in the system, that the doors to them are open for women.

Let me set out what the leaders of an organization must do to put, and keep, women employees on a career track. First, they must be committed to ensuring that women have access to training and professional opportunities. They must also be attuned to family needs, pregnancy or spousal employment, and be prepared to give women employees their support on these issues. At the same time, the leaders must strive to have a strong number of women employees in order to create a corporate culture in which women are confident that they are stakeholders, that they are being properly equipped to move up the ladder.

Q: How to break the glass ceiling?

A: There is no single glass ceiling in a woman's career – rather, she faces a series of glass ceilings, each of which can materialize as her ambitions and expectations rise. She may realize the glass ceiling is there only when she decides to aspire to -- or is denied -- a promotion. The finest sound a woman can hope to hear in her professional milieu is the sound of glass smashing, as she and other women everywhere strive to reach their full potential.

Q: And deal with sexism?

A: Blatant, outright sexism in the workplace must be punished firmly and immediately and a clear message sent that such behaviour is unacceptable. However, there are other, more subtle forms of sexism that need to be addressed through a sensitization starting at the highest management levels. The climate of the workplace must evolve so that that people do not feel they are free to make inappropriate remarks or behave in such a way that women employees are marginalized or excluded.

Q: What are the basic female qualities that give women an advantage over men when working in a big organization?

A: It is difficult to generalize on such a large issue, but I have observed that among the strengths many women bring to the workplace are their facility for teamwork, their sense of follow-through and their attention to detail. And I think it still holds true, even today, that women committed to their jobs will go that extra mile to beat out their male competitors to get to management level.

In terms of the World Food Programme itself, women staff members have some advantages in the field because the majority of our beneficiaries are women and children. WFP's women staff members have a greater understanding of and ability to communicate with women beneficiaries, which is vital in our mission of ending hunger and poverty. We will get a clearer picture of our beneficiaries' needs by sending our women staff members to talk and work with them.

Q: Could you describe some of the main obstacles you encountered in your career, and were some of these related to your gender and if so which?

A: On several occasions in my previous jobs, I was told that I couldn't have the professional opportunity I was seeking, only to see subsequently that a man with similar qualifications was given that same opportunity. What I learned from these setbacks was that I raised the issues with my superiors. However, I did not turn the issues into crusades. If positive action wasn't taken, I found a different job.

Q: Does having women in leadership positions make a difference in an organization and if so how?

A: It absolutely makes a difference. Just for a start, an organization will produce a product of maximum quality if all of its employees are working hard and pulling together. But if about many of the employees – for instance, the women – feel there is no chance of career advancement for them they will be that much less committed to their work. And these women will certainly be dubious about their promotion potential if they see no or few women in the top jobs.

There is also the fact that an organization benefits from having the best people in the leadership roles. Those people are going to be both women and men, and it is of no benefit to *any* organization to exclude half the qualified people available to lead it.

Q: What message would you give to women in the United Nations who are planning careers in the system and want to further them in the next millennium?

A: I would urge women to get the training that will give them the skills they will need to do what it is they want to do. I would also advise them to define clearly what they want to achieve in their career and set their goals accordingly. They must try hard to get the postings and assignments that will give them the work experience they need to attain those goals.

A: On a practical note, it is always a good idea for a woman to dress for her next job. By that, I mean that her clothes and her appearance in general should fit the image of the post she plans to occupy after the present one. People will perceive her as equal to that role. It is also extremely important to network; I cannot overestimate the value of that. Lastly, don't burn your bridges: if you leave a job, stay friends with your colleagues and your boss, because they can be an important sponsor for you in the future.

All that being said, I would also advise that a career in the UN system takes a combination of dedication, drive and inner commitment. You will work hard, especially with UN reform making our workplace smaller and more competitive. But one of the rewards is the sense of fulfilment you will get from performing humanitarian work.

Q: What should an organization do to reach gender balance? What specific action plans would you recommend?

A: The single most effective policy for achieving gender balance is to make managers accountable for hiring more women. At WFP, one of the criteria for managers in their performance appraisals is their ability to hire 50 percent women. In fact, it wasn't until we began judging managers on their hiring

numbers that the gender balance in WFP improved.

Q: As an executive woman, did you feel any animosity from your male colleagues?

A: Not at WFP. I am proud to say that I have encountered only cooperation, teamwork and respect from my male colleagues here.

Q: How would you make the work environment more participatory in order to establish a good team spirit?

A: I believe that information-sharing and openness are key to a good team spirit. One way of achieving this is through regular staff meetings at which people feel free to ask questions, to discuss, propose, recommend and express approval and disapproval. Another way is to make every employee feel that she or he is a valued member of the team. *That* is achieved by treating employees with respect, by praising them when they do a good job and pointing out where they could have improved their job performance if they don't. Everybody in the unit must feel they have an integral role to play, and must have the sense of responsibility to play that role well. And it is important for managers to consult their team members during the decision-making process. I always get input from the appropriate staff members in WFP before I make a decision. This process is beneficial both for me and for the people I consult and, ultimately, for the best decision to be made.

Do you agree that

There is life after the UN – find yourself in a cozy spot to unwind

A former staff member, UN Conference Service Coordinator Mai Zarrouk has opened a café restaurant on the Western Caribbean Island of San Pedro in Belize, fulfilling a dream.. email?

Did you know that

There are monthly meetings of the UN Family Rights Committee in New York. The group consists of UN spouses who are looking for support in their divorce and family and child support questions. The group has access to professional advice and help and it also serves as an informal support network.

A Recognition to

H.E. Ms. Madina B. Jarbussynova, the new Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan

and H.E. Ms. Elmira S. Ibraimova, the new Permanent Representative of Kyrgyzstan. Both were accredited to the United Nations on 12 January 2000. The number of women Permanent Representatives stands at 11.

Flash flash flash

Workshop on Diversity policies in the IMF

At the invitation of Ms. Angela E.V. King, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Ms. Leena Lahti, the Special Advisor on Diversity in the IMF, gave a presentation for the senior women and departmental focal points in the Secretariat on 14 December 1999. Ms. Lahti presented the accountability measures and gender balance strategies used in IMF.

On alert...

Please keep yourself up-dated with OHRM's Web site www.un.org/Depts/OHRM where all the vacancy announcement are posted weekly, or look for the senior level posts in www.un.org/womenwatch. Also the Participating Agencies Mobility System (PAMS) is now functional on the intranet (at <http://pams.unsystem.org>) and it serves as a forum for fostering inter-agency mobility. You can now enter your resume in the database

Network encourages you to keep yourself posted on the human resources reform and the proposed initiatives on the recruitment, placement and promotion system; accountability; contractual arrangements; and mobility.

Article by Leena Lahti, IMF

Mentoring

Mentoring is one of the most powerful ways to help a staff member to develop individual skills and become productive in a new environment or a new role. Research shows that mentoring is especially beneficial for women who may find it difficult to develop networks in a new working culture and to become members of the community.

The purpose of mentoring

Mentoring is often provided to newcomers or women that assume new supervisory roles or are identified as having potential for the highest managerial positions. The purpose is to compensate organizational biases,

to help the mentee to read cultural codes and signals and better understand the unwritten rules, norms, and expectations. It is crucial to find a good match between the mentee and the mentor in terms of profession, experience, personal background, and personality.

A critical success factor for mentoring is its fit with the organization's culture. If mentoring is seen as formalized favoritism or as labeling people "who can't make it on their own," it's best to forget the idea for some time.

Basic rules for successful mentoring

In order to be beneficial a few basic principles need to be remembered. Successful mentoring is voluntary for both mentees and mentors and tailored to the needs of the individuals. It supplements other developmental and supervisory actions; it never replaces them. Mentoring is a professional and work-related development programme, and it takes place during working hours. It should, therefore, be approved by the supervisor. The programme has to be carefully designed by someone who knows the gender dynamics in a work place and the pitfalls of mentoring programmes in other organizations (there are quite a few). Someone has to be assigned to select and match the mentees and their mentors, as well as to train the participants. Last but not least, mentoring discussions are strictly confidential.

Mentoring programmes usually last for six months to one year, and meetings are held once a month for about one-two hours. The programme starts with briefing or training to the mentee and the mentor to ensure shared expectations and understandings. It is recommended that the mentee sets developmental objectives for the programme and discusses them with the mentor, with periodic check-ups during the year. If the relationship does not work well and feel rewarding for both parties, it is better to find a new mentor than to continue. Mentoring has to be fully satisfactory for both parties.

Challenges and gains for a mentor

A good mentor is highly regarded by her or his colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates and serves as a positive role model for junior staff. She or he has relevant experience and strong interpersonal skills. A good mentor encourages the mentee to be proactive and bring up relevant issues for discussion, while she or he still offers active guidance in cases where the mentee is too new to the organization to even know what to ask. The mentor is expected to provide insights into the organization's culture, values, norms, and standards, as well as sources of information. In the best cases, the mentor helps the mentee to establish strategic networks useful for career advancement and to set realistic, but challenging career plans, and inspires and encourages the mentee.

Serving as a mentor can be very rewarding. It is a vehicle for senior staff to

gain insight to junior employees' expectations and aspirations, and to broaden the perspectives and cultural awareness. In most cases senior managers have lived a very protected life among people like themselves and open communication with a junior female colleague can be very eye-opening. For more inexperienced supervisors, mentoring provides an excellent way to practice leadership skills and gain positive reinforcement.

What does the mentee get out of mentoring?

From a career development perspective, the mentee gains from a senior person's experience and professional view and learns alternative approaches to assignments and problems. She or he learns to read the crucial cultural codes and signals, understand unwritten norms and rules and, thus, avoid unnecessary mistakes. She or he learns professional language and appropriate jargon. The mentee becomes familiar with sources of information, key persons, opinion leaders, and decisions makers, and becomes visible in the system.

From a private life perspective, it is valuable to learn from someone who has successfully developed a career and balanced conflicting expectations; be this a staff member trying to balance work and family responsibilities, or a support function job in an organization ruled by a "core function." However, it is also useful to learn from someone representing an entirely different life to broaden one's perspective and experience. Therefore, there is no one answer to the selection of a right mentor. Gender, cultural background, and other aspects may play an important role in pairing mentors and mentees. Still, in any case, the quality of the mentor counts most.

Quote

"One of the most important rights embodied in the Convention (CEDAW) is the right to participate in public life. Merely having women in positions of power is not enough, women's participation in all levels of government is crucial and must become an unremarkable feature of public life. We will know that there is equality when women are as free to make mistakes as men, to be as wrong as men and for it not to be blamed on their gender!"

Mrs. Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
Statement on International Women's Day, 8 March 2000
New York

Article

Sexual harassment in UN field missions

Network is pleased to bring to you the following thoughts from a female staff member who has recently served in a field mission.

Factors that may cause sexual harassment in field missions:

- Mission service means working in a more insecure and unstable professional and social environment. Most of the staff are on 300 series short-term contracts without job security;
- Supervisors have much more unchecked power, much less accountability;
- Both men and women are under increased personal stress, e.g., loneliness, general insecurity and anxiety, sometimes physical danger;
- Due to isolation, loneliness and greater stress, sexual remarks and advances are much more likely to occur in the field;
- In a mission where you have international police, most are men who have never worked for the UN before or outside of their own countries. Their awareness of and sensitivity to the issue of sexual harassment tends to be very low;
- Sexual harassment can also be a problem for men;
- The macho, male-bonding style of senior leadership in field missions is inherently hostile to and excluding of women.

What can be done to prevent sexual harassment:

- Men and women, international and local staff, must both be actively involved in coming up with workable, realistic and flexible rules/guidelines for the field environment, otherwise the standards will be ignored;
- There is a need for extensive education and exploration of the issue of consent, what it means and when it can or cannot be effectively given;
- Sensitivity to gender issues, the situation and role of women is an absolute necessity for creating a positive working environment for women, which has to be addressed in order to tackle sexual harassment;
- There should be emphasis on the fact that the UN must adhere to the highest international standards concerning the treatment of women, while being aware of and culturally sensitive to local standards;
- There is a need for regular oversight and visible contact from Headquarters staff;

- Early reporting of and intervention or mediation concerning instances of sexual harassment must be facilitated and encouraged.

How to create a positive working environment for women in UN field missions:

- You have to have more senior women. "Seeing is believing". It doesn't matter how much the UN talks about gender equality if you can't see it.
- Senior women provide a sense of empowerment and protection for other women. In matters of sexual harassment, women will go to another woman only if they feel that she has the power to protect them.
- Men are less likely to abuse their power over junior women if there is a senior woman present who has the power to penalize them.
- Role models and mentoring are essential.
- Intensive and continuous sensitivity and awareness training for both men and women. This should be part of the basic training for international police in field missions.
- Dealing with backlash;
- Addressing women's issues seriously and consistently in the host country, e.g., trafficking in women, domestic violence, and issues which are usually considered to be second or third tier.
- Women should be cultivated for leadership and management positions.
- Getting women with police and military experience.
- All of the above applies to both international and local women staff.

Letters and e-mails from readers

NETWORK wishes to thank all of you for your words of encouragement. For those who have requested additional copies of NETWORK and/or have provided an e-mail address for us to forward the newsletter to you, we hope NETWORK is reaching you in a timely manner. If not, please inform us.

Dear Readers . . . If there is any manager--female or male--that you would like to recognize as someone who shares our commitment to improving the status of women in the Secretariat, let us know. We will highlight her/his work in our next issue.

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