



## *International Advocacy Reports and Statements*

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### **UNCTAD Public Symposium The Global Economic Crisis and Development – the Way Forward 18–19 May 2009, Geneva**

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The United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) held its first Public Symposium to provide a platform to people and organizations whose perspectives have not been heard enough in the debate on the causes and effects of the current global financial turmoil and what policy changes are needed to avoid such a crisis in the future.

The agenda topic of particular interest to the IFUW addressed “The global downturn: Are women disproportionately affected”? The participants of the debate stressed that it is not a question. Women ARE disproportionately affected by the economic downturn. The effect on women is not a side issue to be addressed after all other economic issues have been solved. It is, and should be addressed as, a factor in the economic crisis. Governments that do not empower their women will continually be at an economic disadvantage because they will not be using the work force at its full potential. The discussants outlined the obstacles women are facing in the current global economic state, and also discussed what is being done to address them.

When there is a lack of jobs, women, as statistics show, become more expendable to companies. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has produced the first global unemployment projections for 2009, and has determined that twenty two million women will become unemployed this year, and that the global unemployment rate for women will rise to 7.4%. Wage rate and domestic consumption is decreasing while gender imbalances continue to increase.

Jane Hodges, the director of the Bureau for Gender Equality at the ILO made clear that women are also indirectly affected in ways that cannot be measured by statistics. Globally, women do the majority of unpaid work. Work that requires care for the sick, the disabled, and those with special learning needs is more often picked up by women as well.

Recovery projects are too often created using outdated methods that worked in the past, when the work force was male dominated. The systems organizations use to produce statistics no longer work well with the current state of labor. The systems created in the 1960s did not predict such a large female work force. Because of this, the policies we use today are outdated. The work that women do cannot be accurately classified in outdated categories.

When the economy is in a recession, migration, human trafficking, and child labor increase. These issues have long-term effects on women and girls. With the increase of child labor, human trafficking, and migration comes a decrease in education for young girls. It is hard to see the long-term benefits of education when the child has to opportunity to work.

Fortunately, some steps have already been taken to improve the status of women in the economic downturn. Recovery packages include an increased amount of unemployment benefits, and pay attention to workers rights, and severance packages. In France’s stimulus package there is a family welfare clause that creates more benefits for women. Gender equality is a development issue. It is

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not a side issue. The fate of the global economy depends heavily upon gender issues that are emerging during this crisis.

Stimulus packages worldwide need to address gender specific obstacles. We must work together to think of innovative ways to maximize the work force.