



International Advocacy Reports and Statements

UNESCO FORUM on UN WOMEN September 2010, Paris

Anne Nègre, IFUW Vice President

Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, opened the forum on the theme “UN Women: the New UN Framework for Gender Equality”. Guest speakers included Rachel Mayanga, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, and Aminata Toure, Chief, Gender of the Human Rights and Culture Branch, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

UN Women is the new entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women created last July by the United Nations General Assembly. According to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, “UN Women will significantly boost UN efforts to promote gender equality, expand opportunity, and tackle discrimination around the globe.”

It was the recognition of the weak political record vis-à-vis women that led, after three years of negotiations, to this far-reaching reform. The new entity will merge and build on the important work of the four previously distinct parts of the UN system dedicated to gender equality and women’s empowerment: the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

UN Women has the ambitious agenda of providing technical support on parity, empowerment, and the development of global standards and norms. Priorities are education for girls and women and the fight against discrimination against women. Traditional practices can no longer be an excuse to deny basic rights to women. Parity is essential; there can be no progress without parity between women and men. Parity must be better integrated in all development strategies. At a recent forum in Athens, parity was considered a missing link. Women must have access to decision making; men should cooperate in this. Investment in girls’ and women’s education is a priority.

We have just received the good news that Michelle Bachelet has been nominated to head UN Women. The operational structure of the new entity is still under consideration. Will implementation will be through formal coordination of UN agencies or selected actions on specific issues? Will the new entity have oversight authority vis-à-vis UN agencies? What financial resources will be allocated to the new entity?

At the end of the presentations, IFUW Vice-President Anne Nègre asked the speakers about role of NGOs. The answer was nothing was possible without NGOs. Official consultative status with the United Nations makes it possible for NGOs to share their views; in this way their contributions are taken into account. Ms Touré stressed the need for NGOs to hold the UN and its agencies accountable, asking about their ways of work, their policies in favour of women, the budgets allocated gender related programming, as well as the gender breakdown of personnel and recent recruits.

International Federation of University Women

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