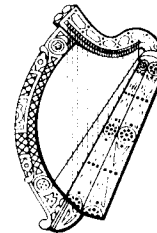




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Informal Consultations on System-Wide Coherence

in the

United Nations General Assembly

Friday, 16 May, 2008

Opening Remarks of the Co-Chairs

delivered by

H.E. Ambassador Augustine Mahiga of Tanzania

On behalf of my Co-chair, Ambassador Kavanagh of Ireland and on my own behalf let me welcome delegations and other representatives to this first open consultation on the issue of Gender.

As Member States will recall, on April 17 at the conclusion of our last round of consultations, the Co-Chairs observed once again that there was a widely held view among the membership that the issue of Gender was an urgent matter which required our attention. Our meeting today is therefore in response to these calls and will, I hope give us a better understanding of how gender issues are being dealt with within the UN system.

It will also be recalled that in our concluding remarks on 17 April we hoped that our consultations today might focus on the programmatic aspects of Gender; that is the activities being undertaken in the field including the gaps which these reveal in the support, either normative or operational, which is available at central level.

In other words, we are not anticipating today a discussion of institutional or organisational architecture. That is an aspect which should be taken up at a future date and only in light of the discussion of substantive, programmatic aspects which we are beginning today.

At the outset we would like to call upon representatives of a number of those UN organisations with important roles to play in relation to Gender issues to address us with a view to providing the membership with a fuller picture of normative and programmatic activities as they stand, including how they relate to each other.

Member States will of course be aware that we are far from discussing issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment in a vacuum. It is almost thirteen years since the international community adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. These seminal documents have stood the test of time as a global framework and a source of strategic objectives and actions. In 2000, five years later, at a Special Session of the General Assembly, governments reaffirmed their commitment to these goals and objectives contained in various subsequent resolutions and mandates. In the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document Nations declared, at the highest levels of State and Government that:

“ We recognize the importance of gender mainstreaming as a tool for achieving gender equality. To that end, we undertake to actively promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, and further undertake to strengthen the capabilities of the United Nations system in the area of gender.”

Of course the focus of the General Assembly and of the System as a whole, as it must do, goes substantially beyond simple mainstreaming to include empowerment of women in decision making and leadership at all levels.

We have, therefore, a strong and enduring normative framework in which work can be carried out in realising the goals and objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. The question arises then as to how that normative strength can be transmitted to, and measured within, operational outcomes and, ultimately, how best the UN system can organise itself to achieve this. In terms of our purpose today some relevant questions would appear to be:

Can we map out, or catalogue, existing work and initiatives to provide an adequate picture of where we stand in regard to gender-related initiatives and challenges in the field;

Which aspects of this work, including existing initiatives for greater coordination, are going well? Are there gaps in coverage, overlaps in effort, or shortcomings of various types;

What are the priorities, commitments and responsibilities of Member States in addition to the responsibilities of the UN system;

What resources are needed to support the field in this regard?

These are meant as questions to aid our debate today and are by no means exhaustive. It may well be that Member States will have other such questions to address. Once we have a good picture of the main substantive issues arising, we might request the help of the Secretary-General and his colleagues to bring together an analysis of where we stand, taking account, of course, of the views which we hear from Member States today.

The Co-Chairs sense a widespread commitment to the objectives and actions agreed in Beijing in 1995 and reiterated on numerous occasions since then. It is therefore fully understandable why the High Level Panel sought to make recommendations which in their view would enhance the UN's ability to achieve these. It is the intention of the Co-Chairs, while fully respecting these proposals, nonetheless to ensure that the wide agreement which already exists on this important cross-cutting issue is maintained and to retain an inclusive sense of partnership as we step forward together on this important matter. To use a summary phrase: Gender is development. We have heard this constantly during our widespread consultations. Our purpose in advancing System-wide Coherence is to attain better and more effective delivery of development to all sections of societies in need.

I will now give the floor to the representative of UN entities working on gender matters.