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mandates, limited resources and little access to real power; implementation of treaties ratified is not given sufficient priority at national level; and in some cases attempts to engage men have been misunderstood and mistrusted by the women's movement, sometimes because they have actually shifted the focus from women's advancement to protecting male privileges.

There have been some significant advances for women in many parts of the world in relation to health, education and employment. Even in these areas, however, there are still grounds for continued concern. For example, in many countries the gains made in terms of improved access of girls and women to education have not empowered women or translated into benefits in terms of increased employment opportunities. While access to health services has improved in many countries, in many other countries women lack even the most basic reproductive health care; and around the world many women-specific health needs and priorities go un-addressed, in part because health research in most countries is still based on men. In some cases, women's increased access to employment is only to work of a part-time nature, occupational segregation persist, and women's wages remain less than men's.

Many serious gaps and challenges to gender equality and empowerment of women remain in other areas, for example the persistence of violence against women; the serious under-representation of women in decision-making, sryuT0TDal cont.0011

Gender-based violence is exacerbated in conflict and its aftermath. Over the past decade women and girls have become prime targets of armed conflict and suffered its impact disproportionately; particularly as gender-based and sexual violence have become weapons of warfare. As the majority of the world's refugees and internally displaced persons, women and children are also vulnerable to violence, even in refugee camps. Even in that most vulnerable of situations – as displaced persons or refugees and in what should be a safe space – women and girls are exposed to violence. The vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS in many parts of the world, and particularly in Africa, can be directly linked to the relations between women and men, as well as to persistent stereotypes about what is appropriate and acceptable behaviour for women and men in relation to reproduction and sexuality. Violence against women increases the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS, including by removing their possibilities to negotiate safe sexual relationships. As a result, many women and girls live in intolerable environments of fear – fear of the violence itself and fear of the consequences of not being able to make demands and protect themselves.

Women remain seriously underrepresented in all areas of public life. In many areas it is not even possible to get reliable statistics on women's participation, which is, in itself, an indication that little importance is given to increasing women's representation. The representation of women in Parliaments globally stands at a dismal 16 percent. The progress made has been far too slow. In high-level positions in economic bodies in both the public and private sectors, in the judiciary, in academia, in international organizations, including the United Nations and major NGOs, and in the media, women's representation is very low, even in developed countries. Many of the gains that have been made in increasing the representation of women in public life can be attributed to affirmative action, such as quotas, established in constitutions, by legislation or through temporary special measures. Experience shows that targets do work; although incentives as well as sanctions for non-compliance are often needed to ensure their effectiveness. Experience has also shown that broader participation of women at local levels of decision-making may be an important first step toward women's meaningful participation at the national level. It is important to note, however, that the local context is not always inherently more democratic or more open to women's involvement than national or international levels. Considerable specific support is required to ensure that women can participate effectively. Where such support is provided, the benefits can be great.

Increasing the numbers of women in organizations is not enough to bring about changes in how organizations work and the gender sensitivity of outcomes. Increasing women's impact on policy formulation and implementation, through explicitly advancing an agenda for gender equality, is critical. Women need real opportunities to influence the agendas, institutions and processes of decision-making. Existing values, norms, rules, procedures and practices within organizations can restrict women's potential to participate fully. Environments can disadvantage and discourage women, through, for example, discriminatory attitudes and practices and lack of attention to mechanisms which support a balance between family and work responsibilities for both women and men.

Unequal sharing of family responsibilities has implications for women's access to education, employment, training opportunities and participation in voluntary activities. It has also major implications for women wanting to take on public office, particularly where election processes require candidates to devote a significant amount of time to campaigning, which may involve traveling outside of their home areas for extended periods of time. In many contexts, women are disadvantaged as they cannot devote as much time to these activities as their male counterparts because family responsibilities are not equally shared between women and men. The environments of institutions are not always conducive to women's participation, because meeting schedules do not take into account family obligations which are largely women's responsibility. Change in this area is, however, happening slowly. In some contexts, there has been a positive shift in involvement

accountability from Governments. NGOs can also demand accountability from the United Nations, both at operational level and at regional and global levels.

Supporting implementation of CEDAW at national level

The value of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* has not always been sufficiently recognized as a critical accountability mechanism for gender equality and empowerment of women. When countries ratify the Convention, they assume specific obligations. States parties are expected to include the principle of equality of women and men in their constitutions, and to realize this principle in practice through laws and other means in both public and private spheres. A major strength of the Convention is the fact that States Parties are required to report on a regular basis. When States parties present their reports, their representatives meet with the Committee for a constructive dialogue on progress in implementing the Convention at national level. The Committee prepares a set of recommendations on action needed to improve the implementation of the Convention (called "concluding comments"). This set of recommendations, specifically tailored for the individual States parties, is a very unique instrument that could be used more systematically and effectively at national level by governments, parliaments, civil society and by the United Nations and external donors.

Many NGOs focus solely on the reporting process, by contributing to the official report or by preparing shadow reports. Not enough systematic attention is given to advocating for and monitoring the implementation of the set of tailored concrete recommendations prepared by the Committee. This set of recommendations for each country should be the basis for work of all actors, including civil society. Greater efforts are needed to disseminate these very broadly, including by translating them into local languages. They must be taken to the local level – made meaningful for local women and girls, and used as effectively as possible to bring about change.

Increased contributions to the CSW and dissemination and use of outcomes

A great deal of focus of NGOs in relation to the Commission on the Status of Women has been on participation in the annual sessions and developing ways to influence delegates of Member States during the Commission. While this remains critical work, there is a need for Governments, the United Nations and NGOs, consider new ways and means to spread information on the global processes to civil society groups and networks at national and local levels, particularly on the recommendations for action.

Many NGOs will never be able to attend the sessions in New York. It is important that a broad group of NGOs and women's groups and networks in all regions are informed and supported to be engaged and participate in whatever ways possible in the work of the United Nations for/women. One way to do this, if they have access to internet, is through the on-line discussions organized by the Division on the Advancement of Women on the priority themes in the Commission on the Status of Women each year. (Please see the separate information note). It is important to ensure

work of the Grail can be said to be promoting, both directly and indirectly, greater equality between women and men and empowerment of women – as your presentations yesterday illustrated. The Grail is already very active in the context of the United Nations through the Linkage Group, in particular in areas of social justice, and has made an impact in debates, for example, on financing for development and globalization and in the formulation and implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

More recently, the Grail in the Bronx involved young women in the discussions on the girl child in preparation for the theme of the Commission in 2007. This provides an example of the way in which Grail members and groups in other parts of the world could engage with the work of the United Nations more actively. Girls could be informed about the work of the Commission and encouraged to participate in the on-line discussion being organized from 14 August to 8 September. Discussion groups could be set up and other ways informing and engaging girls (and boys) identified. It would be important not only to organize activities prior to the Commission, but to continue the engagement after the session, using the outcomes adopted by the Member States to support girls to make changes in their lives, as well as to increase awareness among boys and encourage them to support the empowerment of girls. The Working Group on Girls of the NGO Committee in UNICEF is planning to translate some of the official reports for the session into "child-friendly" documents. This could be an invaluable resource.

Since the Grail works directly with women at local levels in many parts of the world, there is a tremendous opportunity to address one of the great failings in the past decade, women's under-representation in decision-making. The consequences of this under-representation are devastating for women themselves, but also contribute to the failings in relation to democracy, governance, transparency and accountability, transformation, and have direct and indirect linkages to some of the problems identified by national Grail groups for discussion at this General Assembly. Grail programmes which focus on development of women's leadership at local levels could make a significant contribution. This could build on earlier work of the Grail in South Africa and other countries on transformative participatory development, as well as the work of the Grail on women's leadership in many other countries, such as Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Brazil. The clear commitment to young women in the area of leadership is a positive contribution of the Grail. Your network on the Young Women of the Americas is a good practice example in this area.

Knowing that the Grail works in many different sectors and in a wide variety of arenas, Grail groups could, as relevant, increase their focus on some of the other critical challenges discussed earlier, such as engaging men and boys in gender equality work, addressing gender stereotypes in many different contexts, and working to combat violence against women. In the case of violence against women, I would like to encourage the Grail to use the study of the Secretary-General when it is released later this autumn to spread information and increase engagement of a broad range of stakeholders in all parts of the world in this critical work. I know that the Grail in Holland, for example, is engaged in work on trafficking. The report of the Secretary-General, which will be available in six languages – English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and

Arabic – and which contains many examples of good practices and concrete recommendations, may be useful in this work. A group of NGOs were actively engaged in the preparatory process for the study and are planning to work systematically in its follow-up. Increased networking among NGOs will increase the effectiveness of these efforts.

In closing I wish to emphasize again that the challenge facing us is to ensure accountability for implementation of existing policy recommendations - in order that the goals of the *Beijing Platform for Action* and the obligations under the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* can be achieved in the coming decade, leading to increased positive impact on the lives of women and girls around the world. I know the Grail is fully committed to these goals. I hope that I have been able to stimulate some ideas for new strategies. I look forward to hearing about the outcome of this General Assembly and about your future work in this area.

Thank you.