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## **Governments and Multilateral Organizations Must Do a Better Job of Answering to Women for Commitments Made, Says New UNIFEM Report**

*Stronger accountability needed to move from commitments to results, including achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Women must be included in all oversight processes; gender equality must become standard against which public performance is assessed.*

United Nations, New York—Ahead of a high-level meeting of world leaders on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) next week, a new report, *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009, Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability*, released by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), reveals that much stronger accountability mechanisms for tracking progress on gender equality are needed in order to meet national and international commitments to women's rights. Accountability to women begins with increasing the number of women in decision-making positions, but it cannot stop there.

Implementation still has a long way to go in translating commitments to women's rights into changes in women's lives. To date, women are outnumbered 4 to 1 in legislatures around the world; over 60 percent of all unpaid family workers globally are women; women still earn on average 17 per cent less than men, and about one-third of women suffer gender-based violence during their lives. In some parts of the world, 1 in 10 women dies from pregnancy-related causes even though the means for preventing maternal mortality are cost-effective and well known.

Gender gaps on this scale are symptomatic of an accountability crisis. Governments and multilateral

organizations have a responsibility to do a better job of answering to women. *Progress 2008/2009* points out that accountability mechanisms work for women when they can ask for explanations and information from decision makers, and, where necessary, initiate investigations or get compensation. Women must be included in oversight processes, and advancing women's rights must be a key standard against which the performance of public officials is assessed and, if necessary, sanctioned.

"If any man asks why I support better accountability to women, here's my response: because a government that answers to women will answer to you too," said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

"As world leaders convene to discuss the Millennium Development Goals next week, *Progress 2008/2009* shows us that backing international commitments made to women with stronger accountability measures would bring us a lot closer to achieving the MDGs," said UNIFEM Executive Director Inés Alberdi. "This report highlights the challenges that remain for gender equality to be realized in practice, but it also draws attention to the efforts of millions of women who expose discrimination, demand redress and have changed the meaning of accountability. It emphasizes the important role that multilateral organizations must

play in improving their own accountability and in tracking investments in gender equality,” she added.

*Progress of the World’s Women 2008/2009* provides an assessment of each of the Millennium Development Goals from a gender perspective and focuses on five key areas where urgent action is required to strengthen accountability to women: politics and governance, access to public services, economic opportunities, justice, and the distribution of international assistance for development and security. In each of these areas the report details means of building state capacity—or good governance—form a women’s rights perspective.

“Good governance needs women, and women need good governance,” said Anne Marie Goetz lead author of the report. “Women have a different perspective on accountability because they often experience accountability failures differently from men. This report argues that good governance needs women’s engagement – just as gender equality requires states that are accountable and capable of delivering on promises of women’s rights.”

#### Key findings and recommendations are:

- Multilateral aid and security institutions can do much more to meet their own commitments and standards on gender equality. To date, no agreed system-wide tracking mechanism exists within multilaterals such as the United Nations and the International Financial Institutions, to assess the amount of aid allocated to gender equality or women’s empowerment.
- Public service delivery that responds to women’s needs is the real litmus test of government accountability. Women continue to face barriers to health, education and agricultural support services. They are denied access because health clinics and schools are often too distant or costly, agricultural services are geared towards male farmers, and government services routinely target employed, literate or propertied men.

- One form of accountability failure is corruption, and women’s experiences are different from those of men. In developed countries, 30 percent more women than men perceive high levels of corruption in the education system, and a gendered difference in perceptions of corruption are seen in most other parts of the world as well. Women may also experience corruption differently from men, for instance, when sexual extortion is one of the forms in which informal payments are extracted.
- Even though in the last decade the number of women parliamentarians at the national level has increased by 8 percent to a global average of 18.4 percent, developing countries will still not reach the “parity zone” of 40-60 percent until 2045. Quotas or other special measures are effective in ensuring progress: women hold an average of 19.3 percent of parliamentary seats in countries that applied some form of electoral quota, compared to 14.7 percent in countries with no quotas.
- Real improvement in women’s access to justice needs gender-based changes in law enforcement and informal justice institutions. For example, the presence of an all-female women contingent in Liberia is encouraging women to engage with the police. Similar examples can be found in other post-conflict contexts, such as Timor-Leste and Kosovo.
- Women are extremely vulnerable to shifting patterns in global markets in the absence of measures that protect them, such as during the recent food crisis, for they not only assume primary responsibility for feeding their families but also contribute as much as 50-80 percent of agricultural labour in Asia and Africa. Similarly, women’s employment and migration are also shaped by global trends. The “brain drain” from South to North of people with tertiary education has recently become feminized, with more professional women migrating than men. This has implications for women’s economic leadership in developing countries.

For more information and access to the full report, please visit: [www.unifem.org/progress/2008](http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008))



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