

PROGRESS OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN 2008/2009

Who Answers to Women?

GENDER & ACCOUNTABILITY

Statements by World Leaders



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In 2006 I was granted the great honour of being the first woman to be elected President of Chile. I remember the day I took office: hundreds of thousands of women took to the streets wearing a presidential sash, symbolizing that political power, up to now almost exclusively in the hands of men, was now shared by all. One of my main objectives on coming to office was to stop placing 'women's issues' as a subfield of public policy. In all we have done as a government, in education, pre-school care, health, housing, domestic violence, and certainly in our historic pension system reform, we have incorporated a gender sensitive approach across the board, adopting specific measures that benefit women. In so doing, women's policy has become transversal, and part of a larger goal - the struggle for greater equality.

Moreover, we have worked for a greater inclusion overall. We need more women in politics, more women in business, more women participating in social organizations, and more women in the labour force. To that end we have worked consistently and made sustained progress. This has not been easy, but we have not let that stop us. I am confident that, in the end, we will have induced a great cultural shift, which will translate into more justice and greater welfare for the citizens of Chile.

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Michelle Bachelet

President of the Republic of Chile

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“Women around the world are changing the way we think about accountability and democratic governance. Impatient with inadequate service delivery, with gender biased rulings from judges, and with exclusion from market opportunities and from the ranks of decision-makers, women are demanding that power-holders correct for their failures to respond to women's needs or protect their rights. There are two essential elements to women's efforts to reform accountability systems. First, women insist that they are included in systems of oversight at every level. Second, the standards against which the actions of power-holders are judged must include the advancement of women's rights. When we ask 'Who answers to women?' we know who *should* answer to women but who does not. Women are now asking not only that powers-holders *answer* to women, but that what they *answer for* gender equality, from now on.”



Noeleen Heyzer

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
and Executive Secretary of ESCAP

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“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: 'The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the government' (Article 21 (3)). Half, even more than half, of 'the people' are women. Yet for far too long, women's will, women's voices, women's interests, priorities, and needs have not been heard, have not determined who governs, have not guided how they govern, and to what ends. Since women are amongst the least powerful of citizens, with the fewest social and economic resources on which to build political power, special efforts are often needed to elicit and amplify their voice. In Liberia's 2005 election, for the first time, women participated equally in selecting the government, in part because special efforts were taken to enable them to access voter registration and polling booths. This ensured that women's will was expressed in authorizing my administration. I am determined that my administration will continue to respond to the needs of women.”



Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of Liberia

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“ In order to tackle inequality in all its dimensions, women must be heard. Hence, under my Government, two National Conferences involving more than 300,000 women in all Brazil were held in 2004 and 2007 to formulate the guidelines of the National Plan of Policies for Women and evaluate its implementation. With participation and commitment we are advancing towards women's increased economic autonomy, the implementation of their rights and, the fight against gender-based violence. ”



Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva
President of Brazil

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“International human rights and humanitarian law concerning the conduct of war have for a long time failed women. Though rules limiting the conduct of hostilities have existed in various forms for as long as conflicts themselves, violence against and exploitation of women have been implicitly tolerated or at worst, encouraged. The mass rapes of the Balkan wars and of Rwanda have changed this climate of impunity. The last fifteen years have seen a rapid growth in the international law relating to conflict, including the recognition of rape as a crime against humanity, a war crime and, in certain circumstances, an element of genocide. This has been an important breakthrough for women's rights, and indeed, for building accountability systems for post-conflict societies. But efforts to end impunity by prosecuting perpetrators occur after the event; we must prevent rather than redress. The better way is to promote democratic governance, access to justice and human rights. We must recognize the critical link between the rule of law and poverty eradication, human rights and sustainable development. Durable peace cannot be built on injustice. Justice for women is at long last emerging from the shadow of history to take its rightful place at the heart of the international rule of law.”



Navanethem Pillay

High Commissioner for Human Rights

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As we celebrate the achievements of Timor-Leste as one the world's youngest nations, we remain deeply committed to building a country of equal rights for all citizens, both men and women, of equality for all citizens in the eyes of the law. We have come a long way in building a society based on respect for human rights and the ideals of justice, liberty and equality. But great challenges remain. We must continue to create an atmosphere of stability, so that people do not feel afraid and have confidence in the future. We must put an end to domestic violence. We must ensure that the principles to which we have committed ourselves by signing the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women translate into real improvements in the lives of women and girls, not only in Timor-Leste, but all over the world. As a nation, we shall never forget the important contribution and sacrifice of the women of Timor-Leste during our struggle for freedom. Accountability to women is the key to building a nation based not on violence but on peace and security, development and human rights. Men and women must work in partnership towards these goals. This is our hope for the future. The women of Timor-Leste expect nothing less.

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José Ramos-Horta

President of Timor-Leste and
Nobel Peace Prize Winner, 1996

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In oppressive social relations, those who hold power are too often able to close off alternatives, even the very thought of alternatives, so that the status quo seems inevitable and impossible to change. The great power of women's movements has been their ability to challenge such thinking and to argue not only that things must change but also that things can change. We must never doubt for a moment that each and every one of us when we work together can meet injustice head on and create a climate for change. Women have always drawn on the power of collective action to change the world. Indeed women's struggles for gender equality and justice add up to some of history's most dramatic revolutions in social relations. Ours is an unfinished revolution, but we have challenged injustice and oppression in social relations the world over in a way that is key to building sustainable democracy, development, and peace. This volume of *Progress of the World's Women* shows what is at the heart of this revolution: women fighting to hold both public and private authorities accountable for meeting standards of gender justice, as we increasingly demand an end to injustice. When accountability and justice finally prevent gender bias, systems of power will as well and expand, not limit, alternative approaches to human relationships.

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Jody Williams

Nobel Peace Prize Winner, 1997

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“Who is accountable for gender equality? We cannot assume that democracy and good governance will directly bring gender equality and empowerment to our countries. If women are not in the national leadership, their voices on economic, political and social issues will not be heard. In this sense, Spain can be proud of the progress made to date. Half of the apex decision-making body in Spain is composed of women, with key cabinet positions assigned to women. Gender equality and empowerment is becoming a reality in Spanish society. By allowing full participation and equitable representation in the decision-making process we are taking a first step in the right direction. The Gender Equity Law and the Integrated Protection against Gender-based Violence Law approved by the Spanish Congress allow us to introduce gender equality in all the other spheres of public and private life, by fighting gender discrimination and gender-based violence, allowing positive action measures in collective bargaining, encouraging reconciliation of work and family life, promoting equality plans and fostering good practices. Only by promoting the right policies, will we be able to answer this question. Who is accountable to women? Everyone in my government is.”



José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero
Prime Minister of Spain