



WORLD FEDERATION OF UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATIONS
FEDERATION MONDIALE DES ASSOCIATIONS POUR LES NATIONS UNIES

A peoples' movement for the United Nations

Address by Pera Wells
Secretary-General, WFUNA

To the opening session of
Millennia – 2015:
Liege Convention Center, 7 March 2008

Friends and fellow futurists in the Millennium Project, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to thank the Destree Institute for convening this conference and for bringing together such a wonderful group of people. Thank you all for coming. I look forward very much to learning from you and reflecting together with you on how we can live up to Margaret Mead's insight that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.

Trends are favorable. According to a new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of 16 nations from around the world there is a widespread consensus that it is important for "women to have full equality of rights" and most say it is very important. This is true in Muslim countries as well as Western countries. In nearly all countries most people perceive that in their lifetime women have gained greater equality. Nonetheless, large majorities would like their government and the United Nations to take an active role in preventing discrimination.

I am very happy to be here with you. I bring warm greetings from Hans Blix, President of the World Federation of UN Associations. We are delighted that the Millennium Project is now under the umbrella of the World Federation of UN Associations. Our mission is to be a peoples' movement in support of the United Nations. Now with the support of the Millennium Project, our mission is being broadened to help the United Nations become more expert and focused on thinking about the future.

I am not a professional futurist and although during my career I have attended several major women's conferences and events I have not seen myself as a radical feminist. But one thing I learnt at a management course in Australia in 1989 changed my outlook on life. A Chinese professor asked us "Do we agree that the present is a consequence of the past?" We all nodded wisely and said ..yes. Then he said, "If you have learnt anything from this management course, it is that the present is a consequence of how you think about the future".

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We have a friend in the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. He believes that we are living through a period of profound transformation in the direction of ever increasing global interdependence. He is transforming the mandate – and in effect the mission of the United Nations. As he sees it, the purpose of the UN in the 20th century was to prevent states from declaring war on each other...and was remarkably successful in so far as most of the wars taking place in the world today are within states, rather than between them. Accordingly, Ban Ki-moon believes that the mandate of the UN in the 21st century:

Strengthen inter-state system to better enable humanity to deal with global challenges.

His priorities are:

- Measurable results
- Accountability
- Global public goods

He is an ardent champion of equal rights for women and men. His International Women's Day statement said: "I am deeply convinced that, in women, the world has at its disposal the most significant and yet largely untapped potential for development and peace."

Ban Ki-moon has been very outspoken on the need to bring an end to the world wide evidence of violence against women. This challenge was identified as one of the 15 global challenges in the 2007 State of the Future report. He has launched a campaign to end violence against women that will continue until 2015. The campaign seeks to harness the existing momentum in the General Assembly and the Security Council resolution 1325 to take action against all forms of violence against women, including rape in conflict and post-conflict situations and builds upon decades of work by women activists, women's groups and other civil society organizations who continue to lead the struggle to expose and counter violence.

The Millennia program of conferences is designed to go through to 2015 – the year that has been set by the United Nations to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for the alleviation of extreme poverty, hunger, maternal and infant mortality, and other social ills being endured by the "bottom billion" on the planet. Goal no. 3 of the Millennium Development Goals is to "Promote gender equality and empower women". Achieving gender equality is not only a goal in itself, but a prerequisite for reaching all the Millennium Development Goals.

This has been much talked about at the present session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Its theme this year – and of the International Day is: "Financing for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women".

The Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Rachel Mayanja, highlighted the five strategies for investing in women.

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- To finance infrastructure projects that assist women, such as roads, sanitation and water supply.
- To use public resources in ways that reduce the gender gap,
- To scale up the share of gender-related allocations in official development assistance,
- To create a transparent, stable and predictable investment climate to promote women's employment and productivity, and
- To increase the mainstream financial services available to women.

This list of strategies builds on work that has been done since the 1970's to link the issues of women and development. Peg Snyder, founder of UNIFEM, recognizes the UN as the "unlikely godmother" of the women's movement, has reflected on those years:

"The policy connections forged between women's lives and development issues created a profound transformation that was the seed of the fledgling women and development movement. In my view, that massive transformation needs far greater recognition and celebration in women's history than it has had. For women, the economy was the entry point to broad development concerns: development became a women's issue and women became a development issue; the first steps had been taken to give an institutional base to the concept. Those of us who were working for women and development didn't realize at the time that women and the UN were creating a revolution."

Finally I would like to comment on the debate about how the UN system can be better organized and structured to facilitate positive change for women. There is a basic dilemma – is the advancement of woman enhanced better through the idea of "Gender Mainstreaming" – the view that every agenda has a gender dimension. Or it is now necessary to have a strong central women's agency headed by an under-secretary-general and ranking among the most powerful parts of the organization?

Ban Ki-moon has pledged to work to strengthen the gender machinery within the UN Secretariat. He has proposed almost doubling the staffing of the Office of his Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, and increasing the resources of the Division for the Advancement of Women.

In addition, he supports the creation of one "dynamic and strengthened gender entity" that would consolidate existing UN structures, to advance the cause of women's empowerment and realize gender equality worldwide.

In our work together for Millennium 2015 I hope that we can contribute to the cause of strengthening the capacities of international organizations and global networks to advance the status of women throughout the world.

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