



News

Engaging Philanthropy to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Date: 22 February 2010

UNIFEM co-sponsored an event hosted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on 22 February at UN Headquarters in New York, on the theme of *Engaging Philanthropy to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*. Coinciding with *International Corporate Philanthropy Day*, the special event highlighted expanding and new partnerships between the UN, the private sector and philanthropies.

Speaking at the event, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed that societies that do not realize the full potential of women suffer in their political, economic and social development. The corporate case also strongly demonstrated that inclusion and balanced leadership was good for business. "There are private sector companies around the world with good practices — the challenge and opportunity is how to bring these together," said the Secretary-General. "Just as I am striving to ensure that the United Nations deliver as one, so do I want all partners to come together to deliver as one in the field of gender equality and the empowerment of women."

At a press conference preceding the event, Mary P. Quinn, Senior Manager of the Avon Foundation for Women, announced a grant of US\$250,000 to the UNIFEM-administered UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. In 2008, UNIFEM and Avon entered into a partnership to promote women's empowerment and end violence against women. Following an initial grant of US\$1 million, the new grant will support the development of a model to prevent gender-based violence in local communities in Mexico. "The model will target girls, boys and adolescents at an age when their gender identities are being developed, which also is an ideal time to address the root causes of gender-based violence," Ms. Quinn said.

A new UNIFEM partner, Academy Award-winning actress Geena Davis, addressed the press conference as the founder of the non-profit Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. She will work with UNIFEM to advance gender equality in the media. Ms. Davis said: "The message the media sends is that women and girls have far less value than men and boys. Research provided us with some stunning findings: there are three male characters for every one female character across all film ratings." She pointed to the fact that this ratio had remained the same since the 1940s, adding "What message are we sending both boys and girls about women's role in society?"

UNIFEM Executive Director Inés Alberdi said at the press conference that the event reflected the

common interest from all sides — governments, the UN system, private companies and leading individuals — to build strong partnerships. “We want to work hand-in-hand with the private sector and share our expertise on how to move the gender equality agenda,” Ms. Alberdi said. She introduced a partnership between UNIFEM and the UN Global Compact on the Women’s Empowerment Principles, to be launched on 9 March. Written with input from the private sector, non-governmental organizations and the UN, they offer practical guidance for company leadership to empower women from the factory floor to the board room.

The opening session of the special event was chaired by ECOSOC President Hamidon Ali, and addressed by Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, and Michael Patsalos-Fox, Vice-Chairman of McKinsey & Company, as well as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The opening session was followed by parallel dialogues on ending violence against women and promoting women’s economic empowerment, where representatives from foundations, private companies and civil society organizations explored collaborative opportunities to boost gender equality.

In his address, Ban Ki-moon reiterated that ending violence against women and girls was very high on his list of priorities, pointing to his UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign. He thanked Avon for the announcement of its grant to the UN Trust Fund and encouraged further contributions from UN partners.

The event was part of ECOSOC’s preparatory process for its 2010 Annual Ministerial Review, to be held during its annual session in June 2010 on the theme of implementing internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women.



UNIFEM Executive Director Inés Alberdi (far right) stresses at a press conference — attended by Avon Senior Manager Mary P. Quinn and actress Geena Davis on 22 February — that strong partnerships between governments, the UN system, private companies and leading individuals are important to push the gender equality agenda. Photo: UNIFEM

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- **Inés Alberdi, Speech delivered at press conference**
 -  en
- **Geena Davis, Speech delivered at press conference**
 -  en
- **Mary Quinn, Avon Foundation for Women, Speech delivered at press conference**
 -  en
- **Event: Engaging Philanthropy to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**
 -  en
- **UN Webcast: Press Conference, Engaging Philanthropy to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**
 -  en
- **UN Webcast: ECOSOC Special Event, Engaging Philanthropy to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (Original Language)**
 -  en
- **UN Webcast: ECOSOC Special Event, Engaging Philanthropy to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (English)**
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