



Michelle Bachelet
UN Women Executive Director and Under-Secretary-General

24 November 2010

Dear Ms Bachelet

We would like to congratulate you on your appointment as UN Women Executive Director and Under-Secretary-General and wish you every success in this position.

We welcome your promise that *"UN Women will significantly boost UN efforts to expand opportunities for women and girls and tackle discrimination around the globe."*

We believe that this can only be done if UN Women tackles the gender inequality that women experience throughout their whole lives, including the multiple-discrimination that older women often face.

Women and girls of all ages rarely enjoy the same status and power or access to and control over resources as men and boys. Older women have often experienced a lifetime of this gender-based discrimination, the impact of which is carried into old age and is then often exacerbated by age discrimination.

This is completely unacceptable.

15 years ago, the Beijing Declaration recognised age discrimination as one of the factors contributing to the barriers to women's empowerment and advancement. In addition the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002) emphasised that recognising the differential impact of ageing on women and men is integral to ensuring full gender equality and that the situation of older women must be a policy priority (paragraph 8).

Furthermore, the UN has identified ageing as one of the three pressing challenges of this century. Due to the feminization of ageing, there are more older women than older men. Thus, it is imperative to pay attention to the issues of older women.

More recently, the newly adopted CEDAW General recommendation No. 27 on older women and protection of their human rights recognizes this discrimination and outlines States parties' obligations towards older women under the Convention.

However, despite these political commitments and legal obligations, older women are often ignored or invisible in policies to tackle gender inequality and the programmes and budgets to implement them.

For example, a review this year of 121 national government responses to the Division for the Advancement of Women's questionnaire on implementation of the Beijing Platform showed patchy and inconsistent recognition of, and attention to, older women¹.

Data disaggregated by age and sex is rare and broader development policy processes, such as the Millennium Development Goals, fail to include older women. There is, therefore, much to be done.

UN Women, as the lead voice and driver on gender equality, is in a unique position to further the protection of older women's rights by ensuring that older women are included in the standard setting of inter-governmental bodies and in Member States' implementation of those standards.

This will require dedicated resources and so we urge you to consider the following:

- Ensure that civil society organizations working on women and ageing have a voice in setting UN Women's priorities.
- Appoint dedicated staff to lead this area of work, consolidate existing research, identify gaps and commission new research.
- Publish a comprehensive report on older women's issues setting a policy agenda for the next 10 years.

Such an explicit and dedicated response will ensure that older women and the vital contribution that they make to their families and communities is recognized and supported and that tackling gender inequality at every stage in our lives becomes a priority.

Sincerely

¹ Responses reviewed 6-12 January 2010, available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/national-level.html#res>