Dear all,

We are writing to update you on the Gender Equality Architecture (GEA) process and to share recent information we’ve learned. You may recall that following the last General Assembly (GA) informal consultations on System-Wide Coherence, the GA adopted by consensus a resolution to move the GEA process forward in its next session.  Specifically, the resolution requested that the UN Secretary-General provide a further, detailed paper that addresses options for development of a new women’s entity set out in the Deputy Secretary-General’s paper from August. That paper spelled out 4 basic options: keeping the status quo, creating a fund / program, creating a department, or developing a hybrid, or composite entity. The SG’s new paper is supposed to focus on all options, but in particular on the “Composite Entity” option, to facilitate substantive action by the General Assembly within the 63rd GA session, which runs from now until September of 2009.

Our team in New York has been meeting informally with allies in UN missions and the Secretariat to learn more about the current situation and next steps.  Here is some of what we learned:

* The new draft paper for the Secretary General is being developed from the office of OSAGI, and will be drafted by consultants who will be hired or seconded from UN offices in the immediate future. Their work will be guided by input from the Working Group that Mayanja chairs, and which includes UNIFEM, DAW, INSTRAW, UNFPA, OHCHR, OCHA, UNDP, UNICEF, representatives from Regional Commissions and other offices.
* Language of the resolution is being read “literally”, thus the paper will address all 4 institutional options of the DSG paper (Option A-status quo, Option B-fund/program, Option C-department and Option D -the Composite entity). All the topics highlighted in the GA resolution will be developed for each option: funding, governance structure, staffing, relationship with CSW, etc.
* It remains critical that people involved in drafting have “good country level expertise”. Many countries have made their interest in country operations clear. The “normative” side will also require attention in the development of the new draft.
* OSAGI’s desired timeframe is immediate, with final draft to member states around mid-December.  It is expected that GA discussions on the paper will begin in January, 2009.

Our group raised concerns that this short timeframe may not allow sufficient time to produce a paper of high quality. The information received did not lead us to believe it would be possible to slow the process down, in order to maintain momentum. OSAGI believes member states need to agree on the general structure now and focus on details later in the process.

We stressed the importance of meaningful civil society participation in the processes moving forward and also in the functioning of any new entity that is created.  We noted the need for timely and transparent access to information (including drafts of papers that are produced).  We promoted civil society participation, even if with observer status, in the OSAGI Working Group.

In addition, we noted that the GEAR campaign members and focal points would be glad to provide input about civil society and the UN if that information is sought by consultants developing next drafts of the SG paper.  We suggested direct communication with GEAR colleagues; it remains to be seen whether the consultants will seek this direct input.

In terms of immediate actions, we are drafting a letter to Deputy-Secretary-General Migiro and Rachel Mayanja to strongly demand systematic civil society participation and to urge the DSG’s leadership in the process. If any of you has a contact at the DSG’s office, please emphasize this point strongly. We will also need to speak to member states (friendly ones) so that she hears from them as well.

Finally, we have begun to work on GEAR campaign working papers that will provide input into the DSG modalities paper.  As time is really short, we will need to move very fast to meet the November 24th, 2008 deadline. Any specific suggestions on issues of governance structure, the country level presence of the new entity, staffing or funding that you feel we should emphasize are welcome.

We have also learned that the outcome of the discussion of the Secretary General’s Development Pillar report, which was released about six months ago, may have an impact on UN reform, including on gender.  We would be curious to know if any of you have followed the Development Pillar process and have any opinion of it.

We will continue to let you know how this process proceeds and please share with us anything you hear about it.

Warmest,

Colette Tamko

Gender and Governance Coordinator