



News & Views

**WOMEN'S ENVIRONMENT &
DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION**

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Women Make Strides at the UN

Oslo Consensus creates optimism for a reformed and stronger gender equality architecture

The Secretary General's High Level Panel on Coherence held its last meeting from 31 August – 1 September 2006. It appears that they have reached an agreement, now called the "Oslo Consensus."

Strengthening the gender architecture by combining DAW, OSAGI, and UNIFEM into an independent, better resourced, and higher-level women's entity is likely to be one of their major recommendations. It is likely to have some programming responsibilities, but would not replace the gender work of other agencies. It is anticipated that the new entity would

strengthen the effectiveness of the gender mainstreaming work of other agencies.

The report is being finalized now and will be formally presented to the current Secretary General, Kofi Annan, in early November. He will then transmit the report with his recommendations to the GA, which is likely to take them up for discussion early in 2007.



Third-ever woman to preside over UN General Assembly



While 50/50 in decision making is far from being achieved, women are making strides at the UN, assuming top political positions traditionally held by men. In September [Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa](#) was elected president of the 61st UN General Assembly. The third woman and the first from the Middle East to hold such a position in 60 years, Al Khalifa has worked to elevate the status of women in Bahrain. As a lawyer before Sharia courts, she advocated for progressive interpretation of Islamic texts on behalf of women.

At a [press conference](#) this month, Al Khalifa announced that in addition to holding informal meetings on global development and multilateralism, she "intended to hold two other 'multi-stakeholder' informal debates on gender and dialogue among civilizations, and had also emphasized to Member States the importance of all aspects of the UN reform process." Women around the world are looking to her leadership to work constructively with member states to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment issues are central to the General Assembly agenda, especially as they discuss the gender architecture in the context of the UN Reform.

[\[Read more on UN Reform\]](#)

NGOs Push for Progress on Participation, Access at the UN

By **Nadia Johnson**

Historically, the United Nations has served as a critical space for women to advance their policy demands for gender equity and women's rights. But in recent years, women's and other NGOs have voiced their growing concerns that spaces for meaningful participation and engagement of civil society in UN processes is shrinking. Leading up to the [2005 World Summit](#), many NGOs were pushing for

improvements on NGO access to, engagement, and participation in UN processes and arenas. NGOs made some headway after the World Summit when then-General Assembly President Jan Eliasson—responding to the [World Summit Outcome Document](#)'s references to civil society engagement—appointed Ambassadors Rezlan Ishaq Jenie of Indonesia and Johan L. Løvald of Norway to consult and advise him on the issue of NGOs and civil society participation in UN processes.

The Ambassadors held consultations with Member States' representatives and NGOs and in July 2006, they released [a report](#), "United Nations: The relationship between Member States and civil society, including Non-Governmental Organizations", that summarized their findings and provided the GA President with concluding observations. WEDO and partners [Friedrich Ebert Stiftung](#), [Global Policy Forum](#) and [World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy](#) have submitted an [NGO response analyzing the Report](#) to the new GA President, Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, who is continuing this dialogue.

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Beyond the Classroom: An Internship with WEDO

By Darya Larizadeh

A graduate political science student at [CUNY's Graduate Center](#), I came to WEDO to gain experience in the field of international women's rights. Because I have spent most of my years in the classroom, my understanding of the inner workings of politics has been theoretical. But women's rights issues go beyond the pages of textbooks and the walls of a classroom are not the same as those of the United Nations. I hoped that WEDO could add to my academic understandings and give me hands-on experience with issues that directly affect women's lives around the world and a vision for changing a system that doesn't always work.

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U.S. Feminists Redefine Their Mission

By Sidney Abbott

A broad range of U.S. women's rights organizations came together on Women's Equality Day (August 26) to re-set their goals, including issues concerning human trafficking, the loss or absence of reproductive rights and unfair labor or work practices. They also affirmed a clear anti-war stand and embraced a more global perspective. Called *Feminists Moving Forward*, the conference was presented by [Women's Rights are Human Rights](#) (WR/HR) (website in progress) and co-sponsored by [WEDO](#).

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