

Source: United Nations Development Fund for Women
(UNIFEM)

New York – Oslo: Ahead

Date: 05 May 2008

Ahead of donor conference, Sudanese women express grave concerns about women's situation and lack of funding

of the second Sudanese Donors' Consortium, to be held tomorrow and on Wednesday in Oslo, Norway, Sudanese women today expressed grave concerns about the situation of women in Sudan and sent an urgent appeal to donors for resources to specifically address women's needs. In a meeting facilitated prior to the Donors' Conference by UNIFEM, the Initiative for Inclusive Security and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a group of 20 Sudanese women from all over Sudan assessed progress made since the first Sudanese Donor's Consortium as too slow. In a joint declaration, issued today, the women point out the following:

'We are particularly concerned about the persistence of extremely poor human development indicators in relation to women and girls' literacy, maternal mortality, productive asset security, economic and political empowerment and protection from gender based violence. There are several gaps in aid performance from a gender equality perspective:

- Resources for women's empowerment and gender equality remain very limited. There is a need for dedicated gender equality expertise in major peace and development trust funds, and for gender-sensitive indicators on the performance of aid;
- Mechanisms to promote women's rights such as the relevant national ministries do not have sufficient resources or influence in decision-making forums;
- Women's real access to justice is limited by significant capacity constraints in the judicial sector and the absence of reform of Family Law and adequate criminal law provisions for addressing violence against women. Legal reforms must be accelerated to bring judicial processes in line with constitutional equality provisions, including laws of particular relevance to women;
- Women are not given the opportunity to lead and to own peace building and development. They are insufficiently represented on the oversight committees of trust funds, and on all commissions overseeing the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the peace negotiations in Darfur.'

To address these issues, the women demand focused support for women's leadership, including through endorsement and realization of a 25 per cent quota for women in public office; fast-track efforts to address the most severe aspects of discrimination against women, notably in education and maternal mortality, as well as gender-based violence; enhanced cooperation between government and women's civil society organizations; and increased government and donor accountability to women through the creation of a body that is to monitor allocations and their impact on women. 'The time to invest in women is now', say the women in their declaration. 'Let us not lose this opportunity.'

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