

VSO/ACTSA Press Release

10 September 2009

Creation of new UN women's body threatened

News has emerged from the UN that the decision on the creation of a new UN women's agency could be delayed by yet another year. Over the past year there has been an overwhelming consensus among governments from across the world in favour of the women's agency. Despite this, a number of governments, including reportedly, Cuba, Iran, Egypt and Sudan, are trying to postpone the decision.

Campaigners from across the world are outraged by the latest news and are busy speaking to governments internationally to ensure that a strong resolution is passed by the UN General Assembly on 14 September 2009.

Stephen Lewis, the former UN special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa and deputy executive director of UNICEF, has been the most outspoken critic of the current way the UN works on women's rights with his organisation AIDS Free World.

On the news of a possible delay in the creation of the new women's agency, Lewis said that it would be "a terrible slap in the face to the women of the world, a dreadful rejection of the views of the secretary-general, and a deep blow to the credibility of the United Nations."

Lewis also added that "If worse comes to worst, the resolution should be put to a vote, and passed by an overwhelming margin." Lewis plans to appeal directly to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to ensure he works "around the clock to rally the majority of the General Assembly against this dismal little group of states."

Ban admitted in 2008 that the "U.N. gender architecture lacks a recognised driver. It is fragmented. It is inadequately funded, and insufficiently focused on country-driven demands."

In the UK, Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA), have lead the campaign for the UN women's agency.

VSO Chief Executive, Marg Mayne, said "None of the UN Millennium Development Goals have a chance to succeed unless women's rights and empowerment are immediately and effectively addressed. That is why a new UN body for women is necessary and has to move forward now."

ACTSA Director, Tony Dykes, added, "A UN women's organization with resources is already years overdue. If an agreement is not reached now then it may never be reached. To overcome the discrimination women suffer and enable them to play a leading role for development we call for the creation of UN Women's agency with immediate effect."

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