

WOMEN

Introductory quote

"The gender imbalance:

.... "to reaffirm faith [in] the equal rights of men and women [UN Charter preamble]

.... "The United Nations shall place no restriction on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs." [UN Charter Article 8]

The United Nations has been a leader in standard-setting on gender issues for the world as a whole. Supposed to be an Equal Opportunity Employer before that concept was even known in most countries, its Secretariat (a Principal Organ of the United Nations) is in standing violation of the Charter in abjectly failing to meet these standards.

In 1992, forty-six years after the Charter was adopted, barely 30 percent of the Secretariat's regular professional staff are women. At the senior, decision-making levels the percentages fall to absurdly low levels. Few other parts of the UN system do much better.

Departmental and division heads should be advised in writing that their contribution to implementation of Article 8 of the Charter will be a prime factor in any review of their performance. A period of real, not cosmetic, affirmative action in recruitment and promotion must be instituted."

Childers, Erskine, with Urquhart, Brian, "Renewing the United Nations System", Development Dialogue, 1994:1, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden, **1994**, p. 168.

Chronological quotes:

"United Nations responsibilities toward the status of women -- the organization being, nominally, the global custodian of women's rights -- were [during the 1950s] allowed to stagnate; while the U. N. administration's attitude was expressed, then as now, in obdurate discrimination against its own female employees. There was no woman among [Secretary-General Dag] Hammarskjöld's senior deputies; and, during his term of office, only isolated instances existed of women in notably responsible posts at the Secretariat. (According to personnel statistics issued by the United Nations [in July 1989, some 30 years later], two women are now employed in the Secretariat's most senior category, as contrasted with fifty-one males. In the immediately subordinate category, the figures are, respectively, six and ninety-four. The imbalance is 'corrected' only in the most junior and clerical grades.)"

Hazzard, Shirley, on Hammarskjöld's leadership in the **1950s**, and follow-up

statistics from **1989**, in "Breaking Faith, Part I", The New Yorker, September 25, 1989, pp. 63-99, [81-82].

"[The UN Charter gives the five Great Powers right of veto over certain matters]. At the very least the veto over the selection of the Secretary-General should be relinquished. Even small [organizations] carry out organized searches for new executive heads. ...for choosing a new Secretary-General, [however, there is] only a semi-secret asking around in the diplomatic old-boy network that makes the Vatican's procedures for finding a pope seem almost populist. If this incestuous old-boying were replaced by a proper search in the real world, we might surprise ourselves by finding an eminently qualified woman to be the next secretary-general. From 1945 to 1994, male-dominated governments have managed to appoint just four women to some 140 vacancies in top UN executive posts."

Erskine Childers, "Midlife crisis", World Press Review, [originally from *London Review of Books*, **August 18, 1994**], June 1995, pp. 8-11 [9].

[Note: Mr. Childers was a UN civil servant for 22 years.]

"The United Nations Wednesday denied reports that it briefly suspended a senior official earlier this year for sexually harassing up to 10 women after a disciplinary committee inquiry into sexual harassment allegations by 10 secretaries

The United Nations refuses to disclose [such records, which] underscores the difficulty individual workers have in pursuing formal complaints when they believe they have been treated wrongly.

Secrecy laws at the United Nations cover a broad spectrum of regulations but there are no specific guidelines for what will be made public and what will be kept under lock and key.

U.N. staff are not allowed to speak to the press on [work-related matters] for example, nor are they allowed to start any legal proceedings in court without the permission of the Secretary-General.

Even if a senior official is brought to trial, he or she cannot be forced to testify because of diplomatic immunity. Most senior U.N. officials enjoy the protective blanket of immunity which can only be revoked by the U. N. Secretary-General.

'It's an old boy's club and when you have reached the diplomatic level, they all protect each other', said one secretary who requested anonymity."

"U.N. denies sexual harassment", UPN, **May 19, 1994**.

"The UN Sexual Harassment Policy, although in some respects reading well on the surface, is deficient when measured against standards presently applicable under host country [US] law. It is not enough to simply have a written policy which prohibits sexual harassment and purports to provide a mechanism for making and resolving complaints ...

... the UN Policy is remarkable for its complete failure to mention retaliation. In addition, it [seems to involve] ... disciplinary procedures which are confusing, cumbersome, bureaucratic and painfully slow. Moreover, because the investigation and determination procedures are adversary in nature and the basis of determinations apparently kept secret, it seems inevitable that employees perceive the process as being unfair and many actions as being retaliatory. ...

... we believe... that the [UN policy] would not meet [US] current standards for an effective anti-sexual harassment policy. ... the 'four P's' are either not sufficiently present or are lacking entirely, i.e., Policy in writing, Prompt investigation, Protection of the victim, Punishment of the harasser."

"Report commenting on United Nations sexual harassment policy", Chadbourne & Park LLP, New York, **March 2001**, to be found at www.un.org/staff/panelofcounsel/shrep.htm .

"Shame, shame, shame

With all [the current] talk about how to mainstream sex issues and create some representation for the women of Afghanistan, it is interesting to note how many of Mr. Annan's 54 political envoys are women: One: Laura Canuto of Italy, who is deputy chief of the U.N. verification mission in Guatemala. ...

The special envoys and personal representatives and their deputies are appointed by the secretary-general as sorts of ambassadors to specific conflicts or regions. They can relay information in either direction and issue public statements on behalf of the organization.

The Security Council last week criticized the lack of women in such jobs and urged member states to redouble their efforts to nominate female candidates. Senior advisers to Mr. Annan said one in 54 personally appointed representatives is not adequate. But they were at a loss to explain why they couldn't find any seasoned female diplomats or politicians to fill these sometimes pivotal posts. 'It is a priority for him', one aide said with a shrug. 'He has said it is a priority.'"

Betsy Pisik, "UN Report", Washington Times, November 5, 2001.

" Women's Rights: A Red Flag

... In 2000, the U. N. General Assembly adopted ... the Millennium Development Goals, a set of benchmarks to be achieved internationally by 2015. Nowhere in those goals or [progress] indicators ... was reproductive health or the right of women to take charge of their lives explicitly stated. The goals were written in Secretary General Kofi Annan's office, apparently to avoid controversy, and circulated among national delegations. ...

Nafis Sadik, ... the outspoken former head of the U.N. Population Fund ... has [publicly criticized] the United Nations hierarchy for failing to stand up to pressures from the lobby that now groups the United States with the most conservative Roman Catholic and Muslim nations. ... Sadik has also come to believe that men in power see the population issue, and most of all women's rights, as marginal.

'I used to say in the U.N. that our colleagues, especially our senior colleagues, were as much an obstacle as the pope,' she said in an interview. 'That's a slight exaggeration. But ask them about reproductive rights, and their response is 'What's that got to do with us?' I say it has got everything to do with everyone.'

Barbara Crossette, "Hurting the world's poor in morality's name," World Policy Journal, Winter 2004/05, pp. 57-62 [62.]

Note: This subsection in particular, and the other five "UN performance problems" subsections that precede "Anecdotes and Observations", are very much still in the "start-up" stage, due to the priority need to establish all the parts of this archive. Material from the sources cited in the "useful sources" for each of them, and other material, will be added as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, considerable information on at least two major problems of women and the UN -- both long-standing issues recently highlighted by scandals -- can be found in this archive's subsections on Refugee Sexual Abuses and on Anti-harassment efforts .

Useful Sources

(Note: informally assembled by IO Watch, roughly ranked from "most useful" on down, and subject to change as new sources are added)

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