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Africa: Helen Clark - Speech At the International Conference 'Celebrating the Centenary of Women's Right to Vote in Norway'

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DOCUMENT

Keynote Speech by Helen Clark on The Effect of the Global Financial Crisis on Women

At the International Conference Celebrating the Centenary of Women's Right to Vote in Norway

Oslo, Norway

Introduction

Thank you for inviting me to contribute to this discussion on the effect of the global financial crisis on women.

I look forward to engaging with State Secretary Hans Brattskar, Professor Radhika Balakrishnan, and with you all on this important topic. I trust that our moderator, Gro Lindstad, Executive Director of the Forum for Women and Development, co-organizers of this conference, will steer us in the right direction.

At the outset let me congratulate Norway on this centennial celebration of women's suffrage. The right to vote and choose one's parliamentary and subnational representatives is one of the most basic civil and political rights. In my country, New Zealand, we celebrated our centennial of women's suffrage in 1993, and take pride in being the first nation in the world to achieve this.

Article 1 of the United Nations Charter, states that one of the purposes of the UN lies in: "... promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion".

A number of UN instruments and conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action - which will have its twentieth anniversary in 2015, and the Millennium Declaration of 2000, all reinforce the global commitments made to women's empowerment and gender equality.

Norway is among those countries with high levels of gender equality and has, in ten of the last eleven reports, ranked first in the world on UNDP's Human Development Index . In the latest Human Development Report, it ranked first in the HDI, and fifth using the Gender Inequality Index.

Gender equality remains an elusive goal in many parts of the world. A new report from UNDP to be launched shortly, *Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries*, argues that while women have experienced significant progress in education, with most countries coming close to achieving gender parity in primary education and almost three quarters of countries achieving gender parity in secondary school enrolment rates, women remain disproportionately represented in vulnerable employment and continue to earn significantly less than men. Furthermore, they remain grossly underrepresented among political decision makers.

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