



HUAIROU COMMISSION
Women, Homes & Community



Grassroots Speakout on UN Women

**March 2nd, 2011 10 – 11:30am
UN Church Center, New York City
A Side Event at the 55th Commission
on the Status of Women**

Outcome Document



Cosponsors: Huairou Commission, Association for Women in Development (AWID),
Feminist Task Force, GEAR Campaign, United African Congress

On March 2nd, grassroots women leaders from around the world voiced their key recommendations and experiences to Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, Dr. Michelle Bachelet, and other representatives of UN Women and governments. A supportive audience of leaders of the global women's movement and gender advocates filled the room beyond capacity. Grassroots women leaders, each representing constituencies of hundreds, thousands or tens of thousands of organized women, presented recommendations to UN Women based on their local experience in implementing development work. The women demonstrated that they are highly organized on a large scale locally and nationally, and that they are linked up globally through the Huairou Commission, the Feminist Task Force, the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID) and the Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign.



Sharing a common vision: the time for inclusion is now.

Different from feminist organizations and NGOs, these grassroots women comprised community leaders from grassroots organizations who are working to solve day to day problems related to human settlements, land rights, livelihoods, resilience to disasters and climate change, food security, safer cities and informal care work, women's health and HIV/AIDS, among other issues, in their own communities. Among them are leaders of the movement of popular kitchens in Peru, leaders of federations of self-help savings and credit cooperatives in India and women fighting for land rights at the community level across Africa. Their work on economic security and human settlements are issues not yet being fully addressed in UN Women's agenda or vision.

The launch of UN Women brings an unprecedented opportunity for the UN, national governments and global organizations to consult with and include organized groups of grassroots women. Adding to the ripeness of this moment, Michelle Bachelet has repeatedly spoken of her commitment to the inclusion of grassroots women and issues related to their economic empowerment.

For too long, grassroots women have been excluded from agenda-setting, planning and consultations in the UN's gender architecture, from the national offices to the UN headquarters. The Grassroots Women's Speakout delivered an explicit message: **the time for inclusion is now.**

Report Outline

- Opening Remarks, Grassroots Presentations and Concluding Responses
- Executive Summary of Speakout Recommendations



Opening Remarks

My name is Violet Shivutse, I am one of the grassroots women leaders making up the movement of GROOTS Kenya and the Huairou Commission. There is something happening in the lives of women in the UN. A new UN Women has been formed, which is really important for us as women at this moment in our lives. Today the organizations came together that have been supporting the formation of UN Women like the Huairou Commission, GEAR, AWID and the Feminist Task Force, have organized so that grassroots women will have an opportunity to speak to this new UN when it's still forming and still looking for strategies and ideas, suggestions on how best it will serve women.

When we talk about the grassroots women, we're referring to women who are coming from urban poor communities and the rural areas. These are women who are directly affected by the issues they address in their communities. Today we have here various grassroots women mainly from organized groups and federations, self-help groups, cooperatives, savings and credit clubs. These are women living in slums, informal settlements and rural villages. These are caregivers especially in Africa because of HIV and AIDS and women struggling for women's rights, land and property.

The GEAR coalition has played an important role in pushing for the creation of UN Women. We want meaningful participation by civil society so that we are seeing a revitalized entity for UN Women. When we met with partners, we decided to call for hearings for civil society to have inputs and talk directly to the agency. Today we see this as part of the process and hope it will help strengthen the strategic plan that is being developed over the next few weeks by UN Women.



I've been here in New York for two gatherings of the Commission for the Status of Women. This time we have many grassroots women mainly because of launch of UN Women, not all have come because of problems with visas. I feel honored to be in this session and with the grassroots women who are here today. All of us have put grassroots women at the center and supported the visibility of grassroots women as important in development.

We are honored to have Michelle Bachelet, the Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women – Hi! We feel honored because we have seen the way she's worked and the way she's been speaking, and she is the first person at this level who takes seriously the issues of grassroots women. We are also honored to have various important guests here, including representatives of several countries currently sitting on the Executive Board of UN Women such as Nigeria, whose Ambassador is currently the President of the UN Women Board, the United States and Estonia to name a few.

Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women:

Hi! I'm here to listen. I'm so happy to be here. Many of you have seen me in other meetings and I've always said one of my biggest concerns was not reaching women at the grassroots, in the most difficult situations, how do we get to women in communities? So I'm so happy to be here with you. Usually you have a lot of needs but your voices aren't being heard. That's what it's all about. I want grassroots women to be part of the strategic planning process.

My main objective is to empower women. We will never have equal rights for women if they are not empowered. We need to empower them politically, so that grassroots leadership is heard. Women's lives can be improved, skills developed and get help economically. This is the only way to have real autonomy. A woman can say no to violence if she has income. And we need women to be able to have self-respect. They need this to be able to contribute to country, family, community. We need to end violence against women, and we have to involve boys and men to be our allies. We need to continue working strongly to support women's organizations to be part of the peace and security agenda in conflict and post-conflict situations. How we work on early warning indicators? Everything is related to power and empowering women. I've been a doctor and so I know women are strong - really strong and powerful. But many times, they are invisible and we need to help women to become visible.



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Grassroots Presentations

Haydee Rodriguez, Woman agricultural farmer from Nicaragua, President of the Union of Cooperatives, Las Brumas

In our union we bring together 26 cooperatives with 1,200 organized women. We work in producing organic coffee, carrying out sustainable agriculture, environmental conservation and diversification of production, all within the context of developing community resiliency.



We, the women producers, hold up the economies of our countries, and we have trained our local governments on the Hyogo Framework for Action. Why? Because we're women experts. In the Central American team, we have an agreement with the National Secretary of Food Security in Guatemala to train 133 municipalities on resiliency and food security. We've also been training in Chile, with affected communities after the earthquake. All of this is the result of being part of global network.

We need UN Women to help with the adoption of these practices and their replication in other countries.

Recommendation 1: The Huairou Commission members and partners and UN Women should work together, to hold a preparatory expert meeting of rural women producers (farmers), prior to next year's Commission on the Status of Women which focuses on rural women.

Josephine Castillo, Community Organizer, DAMPA Federation, Philippines

I'm a grassroots woman representing a federation of 217 organizations comprised of a total of 100,000 women. We work on land and housing, building resilience, health, getting women into governance processes, and organizing savings and credit cooperatives. Grassroots women in my network mobilize and manage savings which helps in terms of resilience, to secure livelihoods, to take care of health needs, education and housing. But many women are still not economically stable. Microfinance is not the answer either, because it carries high interest rates and often puts an added burden on women.



Evictions are massive at this time. We have different initiatives to fight evictions, including land sharing, direct purchase, a community mortgage program and grassroots housing alternatives. We use our savings and credit groups to purchase land.

Recommendation 2: UN Women should start a grassroots women's fund to support our grassroots women's housing alternatives initiatives and livelihood projects.

Joyce Nangobi, Slum Women Initiatives for Development, Jinja, Uganda

Madame Bachelet, I come from the slums of Jinja in Uganda, but that does not make me the beneficiary of anyone's development. I started my organization, Slum Women in Development, with 29 other grassroots women housed in overcrowded and unsafe homes who wanted to improve our living conditions. Today, we are more than 250 women and 65 young people who continue to empower ourselves to work for securing houses and land tenure. We construct decent shelters and also lead activities to conserve and manage the environment. For people living positively, we offer home-based care and psycho-social support. We mobilize women in savings and credit towards acquisition of land and housing and we engage with local leaders and government to participate in slum upgrading.



As grassroots women, we have developed a tool that has facilitated local authorities and our grassroots women leaders to work together in partnership. This tool, called a Local to Local Dialogue, has been tested and adapted by many grassroots women's organizations, as part of the work of the Huairou Commission and GROOOTS International.

Before, the local government thought we were in conflict with them and wanted to take over their process. When we did our Local to Local Dialogue, we called the local government into workshops where the community members envisioned what they wanted for their community and shared their ideas with the local authorities. The government began to trust us and learn from us. Now, we regularly air out our problems at a roundtable with them,

and they listen to us about our issues. We influence local decisions and they invite us to participate in planning and budget allocation. We are now partners with our local government, and this is truly a case of women's political participation and leadership.

Recommendation 3: UN Women should support initiatives for local women's groups to partner with local authorities and participate in planning and budgeting. The UN should support grassroots women to participate as equals in multi-stakeholder collaborations at the local level.

Recommendation 4: Include grassroots women in national, regional and global task forces being established by UN Women.

Kathy Tom, Widows and Orphans Deserted Association, Papua New Guinea

I'm a woman leader, activist and advocate. In Port Moresby grassroots women started to associate. We have 20,000 women organized in the city. The situation is one of high violence levels. Women can't go out after 5 pm, and they had to close the marketplace because of extreme violence. We're happy that the UN Women 5 year program to eliminate violence against women will be in Port Moresby. Grassroots women need to be involved in all levels of decision making around this program.



UNIFEM has a long history of working with elite women. This is a new opportunity for UN Women to work with grassroots women. We ask that governments listen to our recommendations in planning for safer cities. So we call for consultation, support for peer learning, and to make sure training and information that is part of this program goes from communities to local authorities.

Recommendation 5: Grassroots women are ready to partner with UN Women and want to be seen as equal partners and stakeholders in the safer cities program of UN Women and reducing violence against women in our communities.

Relinda Sosa, National Confederation of Women For Life and Integral Development, GROOTS Peru

I represent more than 100,000 organized women in 500 community-based organizations in 16 regions of Peru. We do handicraft work, we run collective kitchens, raise livestock, and do small-scale agriculture. We know what your priorities are and we're making known our knowledge as women contributing to development in communities. Our families have been affected by disasters, and are living in zones and communities at risk. We are working to promote a culture of prevention in resilient communities.

We are working to strengthen leadership and political participation that allows grassroots women to exercise full citizenship. We are active on capacity building and strengthening inclusion through the local to local dialogues. We have strengthened women's involvement in planning and decision-making and are working towards gaining representation in national government. However this still isn't sufficient.

Recommendation 6: Grassroots women should be represented in consultative spaces of UN Women, including within our own countries. We need to be included in processes to define policies and ensure that our opinions are incorporated because we live and experience the problems in a particular way.

Recommendation 7: UN Women should advocate within our countries for the fulfillment of gender equality policies, and for grassroots women to gain political representation. In this way, we want to change politics so that elected office is not something available only to elite people with money.

Recommendation 8: UN Women should implement financing mechanisms to strengthen and scale-up community initiatives, so that we do not have to depend on the will of our governments. We know that grassroots organizations know how to manage resources in a responsible way.

Caroline Omoniye, Niger Delta Women's Movement for Peace and Development:

I'm representing 500 grassroots women in the Niger Delta in Nigeria and also I'm a member of the Feminist Task Force. I am here to say that the rural woman bears the burden of poverty, climate change, and are denied human rights. And yet her voice is least heard. There are so many organizations that don't work with grassroots women. We carry this voice. Please go down to the grassroots to work with us. Information is power. We never heard about this consultation until we came to New York. I'm working with 5000 women who need to be part of this consultation.



Recommendation 9: UN Women should define a clear mechanism to involve grassroots women, which can also be achieved through technology, so that we can talk to you.

Recommendation 10: UN Women should conduct a needs assessment and we need you to go down to the grassroots to get the concerns.

Response from Michelle Bachelet:

What I've been hearing is what I suspect – are our policies reaching those who need them the most? You don't need to convince me—I have been a Minister and President of a Republic so I know these issues are real. I want to reach everywhere. But you cannot expect that we do this from New York. You need to tell the country offices and you need to organize yourselves so that you represent each other. Usually only one or two get to sit at the table. You need to elect who gets to sit on advisory groups at every level because we cannot have everybody. We need you to help us also in how we reach the grassroots women, rural and urban.

You asked for a grassroots fund – first of all, I don't have a budget yet. We will be fundraising. We have two funds already open to everybody – governments, women's organizations and grassroots organizations. The first is the Trust Fund for activities on ending violence against women. The other is for gender equality and women's empowerment. Almost 80% of the proposals we receive in this are on political leadership and not economic empowerment. Is it that we aren't reaching the groups that need more economic support, because they don't have internet, technology? How do we reach them?



I need you to help me. We have ways to reach government, through UN Women offices, but they are not in every country, and many only in capital cities. I don't want to use the money for a big bureaucracy, I want it to get to the field. Of course we do need staff-- you need to be able to reach a person, partner with them, and complain if it's not working. There will be regional and sub-regional offices. We are going to strengthen two offices: in Cairo and Panama. And we are going to have 15 regional offices. This depends a lot on the executive board in strategic planning process. But right now we're very uneven now – we have 1 person working in Nicaragua and 82 in Afghanistan.

Secondly, we have a gender equality fund – that's for working on political and economic leadership that you should apply to, funded by Norwegian and Spanish money. But as you say we need to find the mechanism for how you get to it and how you simplify it so grassroots women can apply. UN Women is not going to do all of the jobs of the UN. Other agencies are involved in housing for example, UN Habitat. I'm going to talk to Dr. Clos to discuss how to get funds to the grassroots. We'll be supporting the other UN agencies in their work on women and girls. I believe that the people (El Pueblo) aren't only part of problem, they're part of solution. I'm not trying to be nice to you. This is music in my ears. The question is how to have two to four grassroots women to be made part of the advisory board. But you need to do your part. You need to get in touch with our people because they don't know how to find you. You need to organize yourselves to select which organizations get on advisory group.

UN Women needs to be relevant. Make advocacy in countries, gender mainstreaming (but not weakening the gender machinery). We need to find mechanisms and we need your help. Haydee recommended that we have a meeting before the next Commission on the Status of Women, but I think it's a great idea for women living and working in rural areas to come share with us before. The Commission on the Status of Women is organized by member states, but UN Women can organize this pre-meeting. We should have preparatory discussions and we have to think on how it would be best to do this regionally so that we get the issues relevant in each region such as drought or floods. I'm not sure if I'll have the money, but at least we'll have one. I had a lot of things to do at home, in my country and with my family. The only reason I'm here in New York is because I really want to try with all of you, to really try to put all of our efforts to improve your lives.

Violet: We will support you. This isn't one person's work. It's about all of us.

Godavari Dange, Sakhi Federation, India

I'm the leader of 5000 women and a member of a federation of 100,000 women in 8 states of India. We're members of GROOTS International and the Huairou Commission. We first organized after the 1993 disasters. We have savings and credit groups for women, and we collectively improve health, water and sanitation and women's leadership. We are involved in sustainable agriculture to address climate change and food security.

Recommendation 11: Women are always excluded from planning and decision-making. We are looked at us as beneficiaries and victims. Women should be included as advisors, members, experts in local to global planning and decision making.



Recommendation 12: We have to create feedback mechanisms for the women so they can come and talk about the program progress.

Recommendation 13: Grassroots women's organizations have many years of experience working on economic empowerment, so I'm requesting that UN Women include women as experts and give them responsibility to achieve the goal of women's empowerment.

Rose Achieng, GROOTS Kenya

I am Rose Achieng from Kenya. I am part of a national grassroots women's movement that is made up of over 2,000 community-based organizations, being facilitated and developed by GROOTS Kenya. I organize in Nyanza Province in the Lake Victoria region.

We are members of Huairou Commission and GROOTS International.

Kenya, like many governments of the world is going through a democratization process. We are hopeful that this will transform governance to allow women living in poverty both in the rural and informal settlements be active agents of this change.

We are aware that UN system provides technical support to our governments. We are calling on UN Women to ensure that additional financial support is provided to allow active, on-going, meaningful, participation of grassroots women.

We draw from lived experience; we bring solutions to the table. UN Women must ensure that adequate resources are put in the hands of grassroots women to continuously organize themselves to strengthen their collective voice in decision-making.

As an African grassroots woman, I want you to know that lack of peace and security is a big concern for us. Madame Bachelet, understand that we spend a lot of time strengthening cohesion among tribes and different political affiliates to sustain peace. Grassroots women, girls and children suffer disproportionately in times of wars and conflicts. Yet grassroots women are not considered as peace mediators. UN Women must ensure that all efforts to maintain peace without the expertise of grassroots women are futile. We have local initiatives that are working and would make a difference if more investment is made to scale them up. We want to be acknowledged and resourced so that we can secure our continent.



As an African grassroots woman, I want you to know that lack of peace and security is a big concern for us. Madame Bachelet, understand that we spend a lot of time strengthening cohesion among tribes and different political affiliates to sustain peace. Grassroots women, girls and children suffer disproportionately in times of wars and conflicts. Yet grassroots women are not considered as peace mediators. UN Women must ensure that all efforts to maintain peace without the expertise of grassroots women are futile. We have local initiatives that are working and would make a difference if more investment is made to scale them up. We

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Finally, we applaud the African Union for declaring 2010-2020 as an African Women Decade with the theme of Grassroots Women's Approaches to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. We appreciate that African governments have committed to establish a fund in support to grassroots initiatives. Madame Bachelet, we are calling you to support this initiative and truly ensure that grassroots women are at the center of decision-making on which initiatives matter to them and how the resources are transparently allocated.

Recommendation 14: Financial support should be provided for active, meaningful involvement of grassroots women. UN Women should include adequate resources in the hands of grassroots women to strengthen their voices in decision-making. We are also calling on you to support the fund for grassroots initiatives being established by the African Union.

Nereide Segala, member of Rede Pintadas

I am organized in a Coalition of Cooperatives for food production, which includes 10 cooperatives of small-scale producers based on family agriculture. We are located in the northeastern of Brazil, Bahia, which is characterized by a semi-arid climate and prolonged periods of drought, considered one of the areas most socially, economically and environmentally vulnerable in the country.

Studies indicate that droughts and floods in the northeastern region tend to intensify, a fact that has been registered and has drawn the attention of researchers and policy makers. In the region, women and men farmers who work on the land are faced with the challenge of lack of harvest and being unable to work on the land because of the impact of the climate change

The region's economy relies on cattle raising distributed in extensive agricultural land, which is the main cause of deforestation. This, I call the cattle culture. On the other hand, subsistence agriculture and small-scale farmers attempt to produce under highly inefficient systems. The lungs of the region are the grasslands, which have been reduced and the environmental consequences, such as more recurrent drought periods even more severe.

In facing this reality, our vision is to ensure food security and income generation activities based on small and medium farming. We promote this by producing and benefiting from what we have in our local ecosystem, which is the only way we have to nurture our young and respect our mother earth.

Given this vision to ensure food, we also guarantee human dignity, the right to produce, to access technology to maximize and make our production more efficient, the right to think, and the right to be a human being.

Based on our experience, we organized and developed water storage systems, such as above ground cisterns to collect rainfall, artificial lakes to ensure the community has water during the drought period. In recent years, we have actively participated in the decision-making processes and were able to turn these practices into public policies and ensure that more communities in the semi arid regions access these policies because it is not enough just to have policies, but to implement them and make them work on the ground.

Lastly, I take this opportunity to call on the coordinators of the UN-Women to create a mechanism where women's voices are heard in a way that we are involved in a participatory process of consultation where our ideas can echo loud in the UN and at local and national levels in this world. I hope that the solutions that our communities create can be taken into account so we can stop watching our mother earth die and rebelling against the same on behalf of a paradigm of development that doesn't work for the poor

Recommendation 15: UN Women should support a vision of food security based on small and medium scale farming and promoting family agriculture through which not only grassroots women but all society can benefit from the local ecosystem while respecting the Mother Earth.

Recommendation 16: We need mechanisms where women's voices are heard through participatory consultation mechanisms.

Iman: I work for an organization in Morocco focusing on women and children; we are members of a network of women in Africa and the African women's caucus. UN Women needs simple ways of consultation on women's issues and to tap into the expertise of so many women around the world. Work could be organized around a regional plan and a consultation from March 30-April 1.

Recommendation 17: UN Women should circulate information more broadly about their consultations, ahead of time.

Vivian, Cameroon: Grassroots women are not only in rural areas, we also need attention given to women in poor cities. Lack of water and violence against women is a big issue. Harmful traditional practices are common when woman becomes widow. We want those practices to be dealt with.

Additional written statement provided from a grassroots woman leader who attended the Speakout:

Salone Kimata, United Disability Empowerment in Kenya: Women with disabilities have special needs that call for specific attention. Approximately 10% of the population in every country in the world are persons with disabilities. They face key challenges that results in untapped potential due to problems with access to information which is power—thus the need for sign language for deaf women and braille for the blind. They also face problems of a lack of representation on policy advisory boards, and in decision and planning committees etc.

Recommendations 18: UN Women should mainstream disability in all local, national, international activities to enhance the disability agenda. Repackage information so that it is both available and accessible to women with disabilities, particularly those with special needs.

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Response Statements and Concluding Remarks

Charlotte Bunch: On behalf of GEAR I would like to thank my partners including the Huairou Commission for organizing this event. The question is how will we take on commitments we've heard from you in our role as liaison between NGOs and UN Women. We heard loud and clear that Grassroots Women are agents of change and not just beneficiaries of programs. As agents of change we know it is women who are facing the situations and coming up with the solutions. We want to work with you in interfacing with UN Women about those solutions. When UN Women was launched they championed the point that all women's rights are human rights. GEAR has been working on mechanisms for engagement of civil society with UN Women. Our commitment is to continue to work with you on answering Michelle Bachelet's challenge. We have to organize ourselves to tell UN Women how to include grassroots women in all of these mechanisms. We will consider it a crucial partnership on how we achieve this nationally, locally and globally. We need to work to help UN Women get the funds they need to do their work. Women pressured to get the Trust fund and we all can campaign for a trust fund to bring grassroots women into all of these arenas. We should work to create such a fund ourselves.

Violet Shivutse: As governments – What is something that stood out for you from you heard today, that you will keep in mind as UN Women progresses?

Laurie Phipps, US Mission: Thanks to the sponsoring partners such as the Huairou Commission and GEAR. The United States government is very open to hearing from NGOs and women who have firsthand experience of the challenges and obstacles facing women seeking empowerment and equality. It is important for you to have access to your government. The US government has staged some NGO briefings. We've heard what you've said today about challenges. Many of the issues you've raised are also of great importance to the US. We've placed renewed emphasis on food security in our development assistance priorities in USAID. "Feed the Future." H. Clinton recently went through a new development review called Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) and women's needs were very prominent. So were health issues, especially maternal child health and violence against women.



A number of women brought up the issue of housing. That hadn't previously been on my radar. This is UN Habitat's responsibility, but I will bring this issue back to my superiors. We need to set up mechanisms to have grassroots women's voices brought to UNW. Susan Rice and I have discussed this and we are in favor of NGO voices being relayed to UNW in a consistent and methodical way. It is important that a wide range of views and various stakeholders are represented to UNW. We are exploring with Bachelet how to have a conduit to private sector world.

Violet Shivutse: Now let us hear from partners, what is one thing that stood out for you?

Harriett Jane Olson - Deputy General Secretary: I represent the United Methodists Women’s Division and we are owners of this building. We are so pleased because today, through this event, you are using this space for exactly what it was built for 50 years ago. We offer the space for preparatory meetings for and with UN Women. The emphasis today on women as agents of change was a central message. The idea of women as agents of change is incredibly important not only for our church, governments and members. On behalf of our members we wish to express our support for your on-going work.

Rosa Lizarde, Feminist Task Force:

Thank you to all on behalf of the Feminist Task Force and our other partners who co-sponsored this event, as the Huairou Commission, AWID, the GEAR Campaign and United African Congress who helped to organize this event. In particular, I’d also like to thank the Chaplain of the Church Center, Kathleen Stone, and the United Methodist Women’s Division for offering the chapel for us to meet in. As you recall, we were scheduled for another smaller room and it is only fitting to be in this special space for this event.



I also want to invite you all to join in our current effort - our online Speakout “blog site” to provide input and recommendations for UN Women and its strategic plan. Many of our partners and other women could not be here at the CSW so we created an online “Speakout” for women around the world to join us and voice their opinions and recommendations during the first 100 days of UN Women. It is called “100 days, 100 ways for UN Women” e-campaign, and we invite everyone to participate at 100days100waysforUNWomen.blogspot.com. We will be presenting the outcome of the “100 Days 100 Ways e-campaign to UN Women. Thank you again for coming today.

The idea of the Grassroots Women’s Speakout was conceived during the GEAR Coalition’s strategic planning process. GEAR is a global network of over 300 civil society organizations that pushed for the transformation of the United Nations gender architecture. In 2011, the United Nations consolidated all existing agencies into a new entity to deal with women—UN Women, now led by Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director Dr. Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile. In GEAR meetings, the Huairou Commission suggested that one of UN Women’s first steps should be to reach out to diverse groups of women, particularly grassroots women, to directly hear their input. The UN Commission on the Status of Women seemed to be the ideal time for an event where women could give this direct input. The idea took root and with the support of the Feminist Task Force, a diverse audience of hundreds of women gathered at the UN Church Center to listen to grassroots women speak out.

Summary of Recommendations Presented at the Speakout

Programmatic Work

- The Huairou Commission and its members and partners should work with UN Women to hold a preparatory expert meeting of rural women and producers (farmers) in connection to next year's Commission on the Status of Women which focuses on Rural Women.
- UN Women should start a grassroots women's fund to support grassroots women's housing alternatives initiatives and livelihood projects.
- UN Women should implement and support financing mechanisms to strengthen and scale-up community initiatives and to strengthen their voices in decision-making to reduce dependence on the will of our governments. The experience of grassroots women's organizations in managing resources in a responsible way should be leveraged in developing these financing mechanisms
- UN Women should support a fund for grassroots initiatives being established by the African Union.
- UN Women should also support initiatives for grassroots women's groups to partner with local authorities and participate in planning and budgeting. The UN should support grassroots women to participate as equals in multi-stakeholder collaborations at the local level.
- Grassroots women leaders should be seen as equal partners and stakeholders in the safer cities programs of UN Women and in reducing violence against women in our communities.
- UN Women should support a vision of food security based on small and medium scale farming and promoting family agriculture through which not only grassroots women but all society can benefit from the local ecosystem.

Consultative Structures

- UN Women should include grassroots women leaders in national, regional and global task forces being established by UN Women. At all levels, grassroots women are organized and ready to partner with UN Women.
- Grassroots women should be represented in the consultative spaces of UN Women, including within our own countries. Grassroots women need to be included in processes to define policies and to ensure that grassroots women's opinions and experiences, which are particular to women living and working at the grassroots level, are incorporated.
- UN Women should advocate within our countries for the fulfillment of gender equality policies, and for grassroots women to gain political representation. In this way, we want to change politics so that elected office is not something available only to elite people with money.
- UN Women should define a clear mechanism to involve grassroots women, which can also be achieved through internet and audio-visual technology.
- UN Women should conduct a needs assessment at the grassroots level that to get information about grassroots women's concerns.
- UN Women should circulate information more broadly about their strategic plan and other consultations ahead of time.
- UN Women should create feedback mechanisms for women so they can be present and talk in person about the program progress.
- UN Women should mainstream disability in all local, national, international activities to enhance the disability agenda. Repackage information so that it is both available and accessible to women with disabilities, particularly those with special needs.

Additional Recommendations from the Huairou Commission:

We urge UN Women to:

1. Diversify the thematic work of UN Women to include the human settlements and economic issues around which poor women are organizing in their communities, such as: housing, food, basic services, safety, livelihoods, HIV/AIDS, climate change and participation in local to global governance processes.
2. Develop partnership mechanisms that enable grassroots women to negotiate for their own development priorities with other international development institutions.
3. Create an office, committee or program that promotes a women's participatory research agenda where grassroots women can lead research in their own communities.

Summary of Responses

"Many of you have seen me in other meetings and I've always said one of my biggest concerns was not reaching women at the grassroots, in the most difficult situations, how do we get to women in communities? So I'm so happy to be here with you."



Michelle Bachelet:

- Grassroots women should be represented on the UN Women advisory boards. Because the number of representatives is limited, grassroots women should have a participatory method for electing representatives to these boards.
- There is a need on the part of UN Women to reach grassroots women at the rural and urban level.
- It's a great idea for women living and working in rural areas to come share with us before the UN CSW next year. UN Women can organize this pre-meeting. We should have preparatory discussions and we have to think on how it would be best to do this regionally so that we get the issues relevant in each region. We will try to find funding for discussions, but at the least we will have one preparatory discussion.
- Ms. Bachelet to speak with Dr. Clos, Executive Director of UN Habitat to discuss how to get funds to the grassroots, [regarding housing issues]. • I'm going to talk to Dr. Clos, Executive Director of UN Habitat to discuss how to get funds to the grassroots, [regarding housing issues].
- Grassroots women should speak directly to country offices and organize their approach so as to have representation to these country offices.
- Through the support and representation of Ms. Christine Arab, UN Women's officer in charge of the Strategic Plan, recommendations from the Speakout and subsequent input by women's organizations to inform the Strategic Plan can be forwarded to Ms. Bachelet office.

Charlotte Bunch, GEAR Campaign

- We have to organize ourselves to tell UN Women how to include grassroots women in all of these mechanisms.
- We need to work to help UN Women get the funds they need to do their work. Women pressured to get the Trust fund and we all can campaign for a trust fund to bring grassroots women into all of these arenas.
- We should work to create such a fund ourselves.

Laurie Phipps, United States Mission to the UN:

- A number of women brought up the issue of housing. That hadn't previously been on my radar. This is UN Habitat's responsibility, but I will be sure bring this issue back to my superiors.
- UN Women needs to hear from a wide variety of stakeholders.
- We need to set up mechanisms to have grassroots women's voices brought to UN Women. We are in favor of NGO voices being relayed to UN Women in a consistent and methodical way.



The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international, feminist, membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights. A dynamic network of women and men around the world, AWID members are researchers, academics, students, educators, activists, business people, policy-makers, development practitioners, funders, and more.

The Feminist Task Force (FTF) was launched in March 2005 when leaders of international women's rights groups gathered in New York City for the annual meetings of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The global launch marked the start of a new alliance aimed at ending poverty among women and putting gender equality at the core of poverty eradication. Established under the umbrella of the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP), the Feminist Task Force focuses on the importance of framing poverty as a women's issues and calling for "Gender Equality to End Poverty."

The Global Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign has been advocating for five years for the creation of UN Women. The GEAR Campaign is coordinated by a facilitation committee that consists of six organizations based in New York.

The Huairou Commission is a global membership and partnership coalition that empowers grassroots women's organizations to enhance their community development practice and to exercise collective political power at the global level. Driven by grassroots women's organizations from around the world, the members and partners of the Huairou Commission believe it is in the best interest of local communities and the global development field for grassroots women leaders to expand their participation and leadership in community development work on the issues that affect their daily lives. The Huairou Commission is structured as a global membership coalition of women's networks, non governmental and grassroots women's organizations in 54 countries.