

Rt Hon Tony Blair MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
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10th April 2007

Dear Prime Minister

G8 2007

When, on 6 April, the Gender Equality Duty came into force, it signalled the biggest change in UK equality law for thirty years. The Duty requires public authorities, including government departments to take steps to promote equality between women and men. As a network of leading gender experts, The Gender and Development (GAD) Network warmly welcomes the Gender Equality Duty, as a clear demonstration of the UK Government's commitment to promoting gender equality.

As well as being concerned about the position of women in the UK, much of the GAD Network's work focuses on the rights of women in developing countries. We believe that the UK Government's commitment to gender equality should not only benefit women in the UK, but women all over the world.

Your Government has placed a high priority on tackling global poverty. The Department for International Development has recently launched a Gender Equality Action Plan to strengthen its work on women's rights, which is very welcome. Women make up 70% of the world's poorest people. Although they work two-thirds of the world's working hours, women earn only a tenth of its income. Every minute a woman dies as a result of pregnancy complications. If we don't tackle women's poverty and promote women's rights, we have no hope of making poverty history.

Although DFID is making progress on women's rights, we would like the UK Government to go further. We urge you to apply the Gender Equality Duty to the UK Government's work overseas, and use the principles of gender equality to shape your diplomacy and policymaking in the global arena. The 2007 G8 process in Germany provides a key opportunity to do this.

At the Gleneagles summit in 2005, you made a welcome commitment to achieve universal access to prevention, treatment and care for all people with **HIV and AIDS** by 2010. We urge you to honour this commitment, particularly because in Africa the HIV and AIDS pandemic now has a woman's face. In sub-Saharan Africa, where the disease is increasingly driven by the epidemic of violence against women, young women are more than three times more likely to be infected by HIV than young men. Without swift action to scale up existing efforts and respond to the gender-specific barriers to progress, the 2010 target will be missed, with fatal consequences for millions of the world's poorest and most vulnerable women, men and children.

We welcome the implementation of the Multilateral **Debt** Relief initiative. It has enabled poor countries to increase their expenditure on essential services, such as health and education, with women frequently the key beneficiaries. As a result of debt relief, Uganda was able to abolish primary school fees, enabling thousands of girls to go to school. Bolivia and Mauritania have directed funds from debt relief to provide birth attendants to reduce levels of maternal mortality. However, as the UK Government has acknowledged, debt relief is needed for a much larger group of countries facing a heavy debt burden. We urge you to push this process forward as one way to help promote women's rights and their access to essential services in developing countries.

Debt relief is one way to help developing countries improve essential services, but there are other ways the G8 can support this. On **health**, investment is needed in free public health systems backed up by a rapid scale up in human resources, particularly to meet women's needs. In Africa, the only MDG where there has been almost no progress is on the target of a three-quarters reduction in maternal deaths. Particular attention is needed to develop adequate sexual and reproductive health

services, including antenatal services, and to train, recruit and retain female health workers. Countries that have invested in the large-scale training and recruitment of health workers over relatively short periods, such as Sri Lanka, Uganda and Thailand have seen major improvements in indicators such as maternal mortality and under-5 mortality, and the high proportion of female health workers in these countries has been instrumental in encouraging women and girls to use these services.

The G8 must commit to meeting its fair share of the estimated annual education funding gap of \$15-16 billion and we urge the UK Government to be a strong advocate for gender equality in **education**. Experiences such as Tanzania's demonstrate that even the poorest countries can dramatically improve access and that this benefits girls in particular. We also call on the G8 to challenge IMF macroeconomic policies, which place tight constraints on what developing countries can spend on essential services such as education, preventing them from expanding access and recruiting teachers. Beyond the issue of girls' access to education, more attention must be paid to the quality of education provided, one that provides a safe environment for girls, free from gender-based violence, that ensures equality of learning and experience for girls and boys, and addresses the cultural practices and social relations which make girls and women vulnerable to HIV.

The majority of workers in precarious employment are women, often excluded from labour regulation and with fewer guarantees of labour rights than men. Through the WTO and Regional **Trade** Agreements (RTAs), the USA and EU are binding developing countries into a model of economic governance that goes far beyond trade and gives unprecedented economic power to large companies at the expense of citizens both in the North and South. In particular, we are concerned that trade rules are leading to increasing casualisation and feminisation of the workforce in developing countries, further impoverishing women and households dependent on women's wages. In all trade negotiations, development issues, including ensuring workers' rights must not be used as concessions, but rather as critical components of a development friendly agreement.

We agree with you that the G8 summit represents a key opportunity to make progress towards a post-2012 framework as part of the Kyoto process. Rich G8 countries bear particular responsibility for **climate change**, so any post-2012 agreement must include binding targets for developed countries to reduce carbon emissions. Having done least to cause the problem, poor women in developing countries are among the most vulnerable to the threats posed by climate change and the least able to recover from its impacts. Women, mainly subsistence farmers, produce 60-80% of the food in developing countries. With famines and food crises becoming more frequent and more severe every year, the food security of millions of women and their families is under threat. Women are also often disproportionately affected by natural disasters – two thirds of those killed in the Asian tsunami were women – and these disasters are likely to increase in frequency and severity unless climate change is halted.

Opening a high-level World Bank conference in Berlin recently, President of Germany and of the G8, Angela Merkel affirmed her commitment to women's empowerment, arguing that 'we need clear goals, strategies, plans and the necessary resources to reduce gender discrimination and to enable equal participation in political, economic and public life'.

We urge you to match President Merkel's commitment, to support her efforts on gender equality during the G8 process and, in the spirit of the Gender Equality Duty, to take a leadership role in promoting equality and rights for women wherever they live in the world.

Yours sincerely

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Action Aid
BDP Media Group
BRIDGE / Inst Dev Studies
British Council
British Red Cross
CAFOD
CARE International UK
CAWN (Central America Women's Network)
Centre for the Study of Women and Gender, University of Warwick
Childhope
Christian Aid
CIIR / Progressio
Concern Worldwide UK
Gender Action
HelpAge International
Institute of Education
INTRAC
IPPF (International Planned Parenthood Federation)
Islamic Relief
LAWR (Latin America Women's Rights)
Mother's Union
Minority Rights Group International (MRG)
NAWO (National Alliance of Women's Organisations)
NR Group
One World Action
OXFAM
Panos Institute
RAINBO
Save the Children
Social Development Direct
Tearfund
VSO
WILPF (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom)
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