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**Press Release**  
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**'DO NOT LET PEOPLE IN THIS GLASS HOUSE BECOME PEOPLE UNDER A GLASS CEILING', SECRETARY-GENERAL TELLS PANEL ON OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

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**Kofi Annan Stresses Duty Of Every Manager To Encourage Women To Grow and Advance**

Following is the address of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, as delivered, to the panel organized by the Group on Equal Rights for Women in the United Nations on the occasion of International Women's Day, in New York on 4 March:

Permettez-moi tout d'abord de souhaiter la bienvenue à nos invités de marque. Je tiens aussi à remercier le Groupe pour l'égalité de droits pour les femmes aux Nations Unies de nous avoir réunis ici, et saluer le travail diligent que fournissent ses membres, tout au long de l'année, en plus de leurs fonctions régulières.

Je suis particulièrement heureux d'être parmi vous aujourd'hui. Quand je me suis adressé à vous l'année dernière, lors de la Journée internationale de la femme, je vous ai dit qu'au delà des symboles et des cérémonies, nous devons tout faire pour être pris au sérieux.

Notre action en faveur des femmes ne doit être uniquement symbolique et cérémoniale mais doit avant tout se traduire par des actes concrets.

This year, it is perhaps more important than ever to show that we mean business. On Monday, we mark the last International Women's Day of the twentieth century. It is a century that has seen the best and worst of human endeavour. A century that was perhaps the most brutal in history, and yet it gave birth to this Organization. Our Charter proclaims the equal rights of men and women.

When the century opened, women had the right to vote in a mere handful of countries. As it closes, the vast majority of countries have universal suffrage.

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When the century opened, women were launching the remarkable movement for an equal share in decision-making everywhere. As it closes, the participation of women at senior levels of leadership, national and international, is no longer questioned.

In many countries, the equal enjoyment of human rights have been written into law. The world has identified violence against women in its various forms as a clear violation of women's rights. Laws have been enacted, at the international, regional and national levels, to confront what should always have been considered unconscionable.

Yet, much remains to be done. As we stand on the threshold of the new millennium, we are confronted by challenges, both new and old. At the forefront of the new is the way women are affected by the negative side of globalization. Women are usually the first to lose their jobs as governments restructure and companies retrench. Poverty among women -- especially heads of households and older women -- appears to be deepening. Women are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed. If employed, they are more likely than men to be found in poorly paid and insecure jobs.

And they are more likely to suffer financially the consequences of the breakup of the family. As divorce rates increase everywhere, ever more women are left with the responsibility of caring for their children without the support which the father is legally -- and morally -- obliged to provide. It is, therefore, an issue of moral concern for us in the United Nations. It presents us with a duty to set an example. On the troubling issue of staff members in default of court-ordered family support payments, I can, therefore, announce today that the United Nations will voluntarily deduct the funds owed from the salaries of such staff members and pay it to the spouse and/or children.

In the workplace, too, women continue to pay a higher price than men do for simply meeting their obligations as parents.

And I can tell you from experience, because I was once a single parent in Geneva, and I remember the first time I told my senior male colleagues that I had to leave early to go and pick up my son. I saw the eyebrows go up. The next time I said so, there was no reaction. The third time they said, "Well, let's not fix the meeting too late because Kofi will have to leave to go and pick up his son."

I think we should show the same consideration to our female colleagues, because I don't think we do.

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From issues of morality to issues of mortality, women pay a higher price. They continue to pay with their lives for inadequate provision of health care. To our shame, maternal

and infant mortality remains high in many countries. HIV infection among women continues to rise, while too many programmes fail to target HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment among women and girls.

Next year, five years will have passed since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action -- the world's first truly comprehensive plan in areas which are of critical concern to women's advancement. Let us recommit ourselves to its full implementation. The ideal of gender equality, to which we have so long aspired, is still far from a reality.

In December, we will commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. I urge those Governments that have not yet done so to ratify the Convention.

On this last International Women's Day before the new millennium, let us rededicate ourselves to eliminating the discrimination and disadvantage to which women are still subjected -- whether in access to health-care services, in the provision of social services and social safety nets, in peace-building and reconstruction, in the home, or in the workplace.

And speaking of the workplace, let us take an honest look at how we are doing on gender equality in the United Nations itself.

The principle of gender equality, affirmed in Article 8 of the Charter, is a core value of this Organization. It applies to any decision affecting the conditions of service of all staff and the environment in which they work. The full and equal participation of women and men at all levels in the workplace is pivotal to the successful implementation of the Organization's mandates. Yet as the century closes, we, in the United Nations Secretariat, are still short of the goal we set for ourselves -- full gender balance by the year 2000. Clearly, we must work harder.

We have accomplished remarkable things since our inception, when the proportion of women at Professional and higher levels was very low. On this day last year, the Deputy Secretary-General of the Organization had been in the job for just one week. Today, we can find no better source of courage and inspiration than the way in which Louise Fréchette has assumed her duties and asserted her authority. She has unmistakably improved the leadership and management capacity of the Organization.

She joins Carol Bellamy, Catherine Bertini, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Sadako Ogata, Mary Robinson, Nafis Sadik, Rafiah Salim, Angela King and others in our

growing number of women in top positions -- women who are living proof that genuine ability has nothing to do with gender.

Yet, the slow rate at which women's overall representation has increased is cause for serious concern. There is considerable improvement in how men and women perceive each other in the workplace, in gender sensitivity and in awareness of gender perspectives. But this must be expanded to include all staff in all departments and at all duty stations.

For I cannot think of one single issue we deal with in the United Nations that is not a woman's issue.

Women are every bit as much affected as any man by peace and security, by human security, and by human rights. It is, therefore, right and indeed necessary that women should be there to work towards these goals, with equal strength and in equal numbers.

Some have expressed concern that the Special Measures for the Achievement of Gender Equality, which we are strengthening this year, have the effect of discriminating against men.

Yet, more men than women continue to be recruited and promoted in the Professional and higher categories. Let me stress again: preference is given to women only when two candidates are otherwise equally qualified.

The point is to redress an imbalance that goes against the very founding principles of the Organization and which should not have been existed in the first place.

If the United Nations is the sum of its membership, we cannot divorce the attitudes in this house from those in Member States. Among 185 Member States today, there are only 10 women Permanent Representatives. That means that for every woman ambassador to the United Nations, there are almost 20 male ones. So if you look at it from a gender perspective, you have 50 per cent of the population of the world's nations producing only some 5 per cent of its representation to the United Nations.

Yet, in every country I have visited, I have been impressed by the high level of competence of women: in government, in civil society, in science and academia, in business. And every time, I find myself wishing that Member States would put more of these women forward for service to the United Nations, both as Permanent Representatives and as United Nations officials.

And so I hope that the goal of 50-50 gender distribution in the United Nations Secretariat will be embraced by all Member States. As we strive to

meet that goal, it is clearly in the interest of all countries to field as many women candidates as possible for key positions in order to optimize their country's presence in the Organization.

Let us also avoid pigeon-holing women as being more adept at this or that. It troubles me when I hear about women "enriching" or "bringing a human touch to" our work -- as though women were an incidental ornament to the main machinery. Or, for that matter, as though we men were incapable of showing a human face. I would hope, at least, that the latter is not the case.

Women are not the feel-good factors of international affairs. Women are half of humankind. As such, they are equally concerned with, and should be equally involved in, the work of the one Organization which works for the advancement of all humankind.

Having dedicated itself to the rights of human beings, the Organization is only as good as the way it upholds the rights of its own.

Some of you may remember the thought-provoking book written more than 30 years ago by ex-United Nations staffer Shirley Hazzard, entitled, aptly, *People in Glass Houses*. She points out that it is difficult to believe completely in an enterprise that requires one's own diminution.

Ms. Hazzard was also right in her choice of title: we do live in a glass house, and it could hardly be otherwise. In the sense that we are, and should be, open to scrutiny and offering transparency at all times; and in the sense that, since we are not without sin, none of us can afford to throw stones.

But that does not mean any of us need live under a glass ceiling. I would urge you all today not to impose limits on yourselves. You possess the key to the advancement of women on one condition: you must have the courage to believe that what you do makes a difference. Take charge of your career development; define your interests; map out a strategy of how you can contribute most effectively to the work of the Organization and, thereby, to your own professional development. And above all, remember what Eleanor Roosevelt once said. "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

It is the duty of every manager to encourage you to grow and advance.

I have had opportunities in my own career to encourage some women to move forward. I recall that, here in this Building, years ago there was a woman in the General Service category. We put up a vacancy announcement for a Professional position. In my mind, she was the most qualified, but she did not apply. So when I called her and said, "Pat, why didn't you apply?" she

said, "I don't think I can do the job." I said, "I know you can do it; think about it over the weekend and come back."

She came back on Monday and said, "Well, if you think I can do it, then I suppose I can do it; but I still have a problem." I asked, "What is your problem?" She said, "I have to make speeches and I do not like to speak publicly." I said, "How often do you have to speak?" She said, "Well, we have induction courses twice a year and I am required to speak on each occasion." I said, "But that is 20 minutes twice a year, and because of that you are going to turn down a promotion?" And then I explained to her how eloquent she was, because when you asked her in meetings to explain her position she spoke very clearly and very eloquently without being pompous and everybody on the staff said, "You are a good speaker."

She took the job. Within three months she had eliminated a perennial backlog we had had for years, and she became the best Chief of the unit level and retired at the P-4 level, having been promoted from G-5. But she would not have applied if I had not sought her out.

The second one was in Geneva, where, again, a vacancy was advertised and the best candidate, a woman, did not apply. And we had men who had no business applying putting themselves forward and trying to bluff their way through. When I finally called and said, "Why didn't you do it?", she said, "They will think I am ambitious and I'm over-reaching." And I said, "No, no, you should apply", and I encouraged her to do it and she did extremely well.

I am sharing these experiences with you not to boast or anything, but really to say that we all have a responsibility — and particularly those in leadership positions — to look out for good women, for good staff, and encourage, mentor and steer them on. The good people, the good candidates that we really often want to find are not always the ones who come forward. So we should really do this.

All of you might draw courage from the words of the Deputy Secretary- General, who said recently: "When I look back on my career, my only regret is that I was too timid, never too bold ... As a rule, bureaucracies tend to resist innovation and change. All too often, they have a tendency to predict that the roof will cave in. More often than not, the roof does not cave in."

She is right. The roof does not cave in -- but you can break through the ceiling. So, have the courage to set an example for all to see. Do not let people in this glass house become people under a glass ceiling. Should you perceive that there is one, let us break through it together. Thank you, and the very best of luck to you all.

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