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Press Release
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**SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM,
FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS OF UNITED NATIONS, TO SPREAD
KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF ORGANIZATION**

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Kofi Annan Says End Product of Reform Should Be Restoration Of Confidence in Organization and Its Capacity To Do What World Needs It To Do

Following is the statement of Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the meeting of the International Women's Forum at Headquarters today:

I am delighted to be with you today. The International Women's Forum is made up of valued friends of the United Nations. You are valued, because of your commitment and your knowledge. You are candid friends. For me, therefore, this meeting with you today is an opportunity to exchange views and ideas.

Today, no-one can be in any doubt that the United Nations faces major challenges. We have to catch up with 52 years of history.

More than that: we have, at one and the same time, to rebuild the Organization, and to ensure that it is fit to take on new challenges. We have to reform our Organization for the new millennium.

I start from the premise that the United Nations is the only United Nations we have. There is no other instrument for global action, no other universal organization in which 185 Member States take part, no other institution, therefore, which has the legitimacy that universal membership gives to the United Nations.

In the United Nations, we have inherited an unparalleled instrument for international cooperation. It is an instrument at the service of humankind, waiting to be fully utilized, with enormous, unrealized potential. And there is a growing agenda of global problems crying out for global action.

The problem is that we are confronting the problems of the 1990s, and facing the agenda of the next century, with an instrument designed in the 1940s, which has undergone only piecemeal change in the intervening period. Fundamental changes have occurred, in this period, in the international

system. Yet they have not been mirrored by changes in the institution of the United Nations itself.

Those who formed the United Nations -- those, like Roosevelt and Churchill, who first conceived of such an Organization, in the darkest days of the Second World War -- had in mind a common front against armed aggression by States. So the United Nations was formed, in the aftermath of the Second World War, to bring nations together to prevent war and to encourage economic and social development. It was a great act of vision.

But the world has changed since then. One major change is that economic development is now seen as inseparable from military and political considerations, and as essential for the creation of human security in the broadest sense. The promotion of peace and of economic and social progress used to be viewed as distinct, if complementary, objectives. Now they are seen as interlocking and mutually reinforcing.

The very nature of inter-State relations, and even of war itself, has changed. War between States is rare; war within States is much more frequent. Many former colonies have become independent States. The bipolar structure of international relations has gone.

The United Nations played an important part in mediating many of the great changes of the past half century.

It provided a forum through which the anti-colonial struggle, and the fight against apartheid, could be defined and articulated. It gave unique political and intellectual stimulus to the debate about development. It helped and encouraged the development of international law. As the only universal body of States, it provided a meeting place for informal contacts between representatives of the former rival power blocs. And in numerous international disputes, by deploying peace-keepers -- a function not defined in the Charter -- the United Nations was able to keep the opposing sides separate, and to work for peace. The record is one of solid achievement.

Today, States need united action perhaps more than ever, but not so much against armed aggression by States as against other, insidious, global dangers. These new threats are global in nature. No State, acting on its own, can defeat them.

They include the great environmental challenges, like global warming, and atmospheric and marine pollution; new epidemics and pandemics, like HIV/AIDS; international terrorism; and transnational drug trafficking and crime, such as money laundering. They require a global response.

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To mount such a response, to do so effectively and efficiently, our Organization has to change. That is why I attach such importance to reform. It is the key to the future of the Organization.

Reform is a positive process, designed to strengthen the Organization. Reform does not mean simply cutting and slashing. Cutting and slashing, where we are talking about the elimination of waste and duplication, is of course necessary, at all times.

We are determined to eliminate overlapping mandates and duplication, and to reduce administrative overhead costs. In tackling these problems, my sole aim is to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations, and to make the Organization better able to do what its Member States and their peoples want it to do. The aim, in other words, is to make our institution better able to carry out the tasks it has to perform.

Reform, as I see it, is synonymous with revitalization, with reinvigoration, with rejuvenation.

And reform should produce as an end product the restoration of confidence in the Organization and in its capacity to do what the world expects and needs it to do.

The reform process will culminate in mid-July, when I will present my proposals to a special meeting of the General Assembly. But reform will still go on. Some reforms will be ongoing or permanent.

For example, we will have to build a new relationship with the organizations of civil society.

The Charter of the United Nations is the property not only of States but also of the peoples of the world: its opening words are, "We, the peoples...."

We have to find ways of building into our system a more systematic recognition of that fact. We have to show that the United Nations is not the exclusive property of ministers and diplomats, but is there to advance and represent the interests of people as well. We have to show that this Organization deals not in dusty abstractions, but in crucial life-and-death matters affecting the well-being of all women, men and children, every citizen of this planet.

The International Women's Forum is one of a myriad of organizations, throughout the world, composed of individuals and groups, seeking to advance common aims and express shared values. You are part of what has come to be

known as civil society. You are also an expression of shared values and aspirations.

Everywhere, such groups are society -- even though their true importance is only now receiving full recognition. It is universally recognized that States cannot do everything themselves, and that societies are made up not only of individual human beings but also of groups. They range from youth groups and women's groups to labour and church organizations and voluntary relief organizations and private sector organizations. They help to sustain society as a whole and to complement the work of States and of governments.

Recently, mainly as part of the global conferences process, and in particular since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio de Janeiro five years ago, there is an emerging recognition of the vital and indispensable role of the organizations of civil society.

The contribution of groups such as the International Women's Forum is vital to the life of the United Nations. Today, the United Nations values and needs that contribution more than ever. We need to ensure that our friends and supporters help to spread knowledge and understanding of the United Nations. That is my appeal to you today.

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