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**Gender Equality:
Striving for Justice in an Unequal World**

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I want to start by congratulating UNRISD on their report and for bringing together this very impressive group of scholars for this conference. When I heard your presentation I realized what makes UNRISD special in the UN context: It's autonomy and its willingness to do critical research but also to draw on the experience of people from the south and maybe that explains why some of the things that come out in the UNRISD report are not things that you normally expect to find in UN reports. So I want to thank you very much indeed for this occasion and for making this contribution for what is a very special week for many of us. Last Friday, 4 March, the UN celebrated not just 10 years since Beijing but it is really 30 years of United Nations efforts to promote gender equality. Those who attended the session on Friday I gathered that you had the opportunity of seeing the women who had headed the four World Conferences: Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and of course Beijing in 1995. The Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and the countless other women who worked throughout the system on this agenda throughout the years (and these are not just women from the UN but as you mentioned, many women, femocrats within so many important spaces in the foundations and in many other institutions) all of them representing what I consider a women's movement whether you work within the bureaucracy, within the foundations or on the streets outside, I identify with all of you as part of this movement and with our male supporters as well (I hope Dr. Mkandawire realizes he is considered part of our movement.). Our male allies are so few that they are very dear to us.

As part of the celebrations there is a very inspiring exhibition in the visitors lobby of the General Assembly building sponsored by DAWN, by the interagency network of women and gender equality and we can see in the posters and the video historical perspective of the four World Conferences on women and photographic representation of the Beijing platform for action's 12 critical areas of concern. If you were there last week, as I was, you would have also seen hundreds of women from around the world. Women on official delegations but also representing women's networks and organizations, women working within the UN, all celebrating these three decades of a period that has really changed our world. They are also working very hard to defend the gains that were made in Beijing against the relentless efforts of fundamentalist forces under the leadership of the most powerful country of the world joining forces with the most powerful institution of the world to reverse our gains. That the women succeeded leaves one in no doubt, that women have political voice.

For me the most significant achievement of these three decades is the emergence of women as a political constituency, a global women's movement. In my book, commissioned by Zed Books ...it is called the "Global Women's Movement: Issues, Origins and Strategies", I trace the evolution of this movement from a diversity of local movements to an international movement by the end of the decade for women and to a global movement which we see emerging in the context of the conferences of 1990s, not women's conferences but women organizing around global conferences, on environment, on human rights, on population and on social development in Copenhagen in 1995. But what is this movement about? Is it just about advances in women's education, health, incomes and political representation? When women achieve parity with men in education, get appointed to the top posts in corporations and institutions of governance, gain seats in local assemblies and parliaments in the

world, will it make a difference to the kind of world we live in? Will it stop the violence, physical, psychological and economic, that thousands of women experience everyday? Will it stop the wars? Up to now it hasn't.

It was just about 30 years that I attended my first UN meeting. The regional meeting in preparation for the first world conference on women in Mexico City and I recall the very well orchestrated efforts of the delegations from Venezuela, the host of the meeting, Cuba and Mexico to place on the agenda the call for new international economic order and my own alliance with the delegates of the U.S. in opposing this. How far I have come from those days when I could not see the relevance of a global call for economic justice to women's agenda. In the mid-70s issues of social justice were uncentered of the North-South dialogues and the UN itself was the major arena for these debates. Today, UN's calls are for the implementation of 8 goals (the MDGs), which I have called the most distracting gimmicks, extracted selectively from the global conferences of the 1990s and public-private partnerships in the implementation. A strategy in which the private partner calls the shots. How far the UN has departed from those calls for redistribution and justice and I am very glad that UNRISD has acknowledged that and that the report has acknowledged that. The fact that the UN and many of the women's movements, many in the women's movement have moved in opposite directions in the past 30 years, one moving away from seriously addressing issues of inequality and injustice and the other, moving towards greater clarity about the issues, is a measure of the pitfalls and complexities inherent in achieving changes towards a more just and equitable world order. Any move toward this vision is fraught with threats of reversal. The powerful do not easily share power, they are accustomed to control, especially when that control enhances their own power. There are economic, social and political benefits to those who exercise control over women's lives, time, labour, and sexuality. In the corridors of the conferences rooms in the General Assembly, there were also well organized and well funded women and men whose mission is to reverse the gains made on our journey towards gender equality. You have seen these reverses in the backlash, fuelled by the very advances in women's lives. The more we move forward, the greater the backlash. It is actually a sign that we are moving forward.

Today we face a conjuncture of relentless neo-liberalism, religious fundamentalism, aggressive militarism and the resurgence of racism that places us all in jeopardy. The threat of global warming, the increase in trafficking of women and children, the spread of HIV as virus, the culture of drugs accompanied by crime, violence and political corruption and most of all the war on terrorism that makes no distinction between those who struggle for social justice and political voice and the extremists and criminals determined to cause maximum disruption to our lives. All of this reminds us that the world is probably a more dangerous place today than it was 30 years ago. We need to go beyond affirmative action and equality itself to transformation. I think we have to go beyond the numbers of the 12 critical areas of concern and the 8 goals. To seek a more fundamental change in the relationships of power that continue to threaten our world, we need to go beyond affirmative action and equality itself to achieve this transformation. An affirmative action approach focused on the number women in parliament, in schools, in heading corporations and so on, is only the first and necessary step toward the transformation of the relations of power that perpetuate the oppression/subordination of women and block the policies that will address issues of importance to women's gender interests for security in the

widest sense of the word. In fact we need a new discourse and within this a new definition of human security.

In 2003 the UN published its report on human security under the leadership of Amartya Sen and Sadako Ogata. “The UN commission on human security recognized that poverty and inequality are at the root causes of armed conflict and that human security must be approached in an inclusive and holistic manner. Not only examining the symptoms or manifestations of human insecurity, but also seeking to produce recommendations that address root causes.” That is a quote from Sadako Ogata herself. The UN Commission used a conception of human security that linked “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want”. It adopted a human focus and capabilities approach, of course with Amartya Sen there, that takes shape from people’s reflections on the basis of their own experience and knowledge, of their values and needs and third, that identified clear and significant links to human development and human rights. It recognized that gender justice is at the heart of freedom from want (that is economic justice) and central to the achievement of freedom from fear and that a human focused and capabilities approach that takes shape from people’s reflections on the basis of their own experience and knowledge, of their values and needs, must acknowledge the differences, sometimes fundamental differences in the experiences, knowledge, values and needs of men and women. However, although the commission identified clear and significant links to human development and human rights, it failed to draw on the excellent and comprehensive feminist literature on both topics. As a result, there was a disconnect between the excellent examples drawn from women’s experiences and its failure to recognize the need for a special focus on that experience. In fact, it gave insufficient attention to the threats to women’s lives and livelihoods and it failed to reflect on the significant contradictions between the rhetoric of the patriarchal state and the reality of the failure of most states to protect the rights that guarantee the needs of women worldwide. In short, it stopped short of making the promised link to gender justice or to acknowledging that those whose seek militaristic approaches as the key to national and human security are often those whose policies tend to be antagonistic to women’s development and women’s human rights. In fact it missed the point, that if it were to contribute to a better understanding of human security it had to acknowledge the link between gender justice and economic justice and recognize women’s agency as the key to securing human security for everyone. But that a UN commission, even one led by people who are sympathetic to women’s rights, cannot speak the truth about human security is indicative of the fundamental problem of an institution that mirrors the imbalance of power in the international community.

The global women’s movement must speak truth to power.

So how can women’s political voice move us towards this truth and how can women’s political voice help us stop the injustice that leads to war and its brutal and dehumanizing consequences. I want to consider three link approaches. First of all, I think we have to question the way the UN approaches the issue of security; human and national security. Secondly, we have to mobilize and amplify feminist voices against violence and war. And thirdly, we have to integrate this voice into post conflict situations and peace movements. Let me say very briefly something about those three.

First of all, questioning the way the UN approaches the issues. I said something already about the human security commission, so let me just say that traditionally the UN approaches this by portraying women as the victims of war and they tend to emphasize that impact of war and conflict on women although the UN has recognized the role of women in peacekeeping and conflict resolution in its resolution 1335 of 2000 and the UNIFEM report of women and conflict. However, when the five permanent members of the Security Council are among the countries that are the chief manufacturers of weapons and the apparatus of war, we have to wonder whether the UN's highest councils can ever help to bring about peace. In all of the UN publications there is seldom anything to challenge the notion that war is a legitimate response to conflict between groups and countries. But the greatest omission of all in all of these reports is the failure to pay attention to the links between militarism and patriarchal definitions of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity or to the sexualized and racialized imagery around domination, terrorism and war. For this we have to look outside the UN, through work of feminist scholars and writers like Cynthia Enloe, Michael Koffman, Robin Morgan, Kamla Bhasin, Amina Mama, to name a few. And I want to quote Michael Koffman "Aggression is embedded in the psyches of men in qualities that far too many men have learned to value embedded in our political, social and religious cultures where men admire their ability to kill far more than their ability to give and nurture life, celebrating a destructive brand of masculinity far more than the tender feeling they associate with femininity which apparently they have come to despise". He has also drawn attention to the way this appears to be widespread and acceptable definitions of manhood serve the purpose of those who wish to mobilize public opinion and vast resources to unleash so much destruction. They are able to tap into a reservoir of fear of impotency and a love of triumph and masculinity and turn these two as their own economic and political ends." Those of you who followed the debate in the Security Council on the rush to war in Iraq, may remember the way in which Colin Powell used the words 'afraid' and 'impotent' to threaten the men regarding their reluctance to support the US' determination to go to war. Most people recognize that poverty and injustice fuel the deep resentment that makes it possible for extremists to recruit the disenfranchised for their deadly projects but few recognize the sexism inherent in systems that invest in killing rather than caring.

Secondly, let me say something about the mobilization and amplification of feminist political voice against violence and war. Women's advocacy against violence and war is often too polite and too muted. Where is the passion, the sense of outrage that can galvanise us into action? Surely the sources of that passion lie in women's own experiences of violence and violation. One month before I took up the post on Women's affairs with the Government of Jamaica, two of my sisters were murdered in New York, in a hotel not far from here, by the partner of the older one. She wanted to leave him and had asked her sister to come to New York to discuss the situation. There were no witnesses to the murder, which he later confessed to his mother before committing suicide by throwing himself in the path of an oncoming train in the New York subway.

My work has always focused on socio-economic issues and only peripherally to issues of violence against women. Over the years, as I became increasingly involved in feminist organizing within the women's movement, I address more centrally the issue of violence against women although I am still identified with issues of poverty, macroeconomic policy economic justice and trade. It was only when my son's fiancée

was murdered by a stranger who tried to rape her that I realized the extent to which my commitment to this movement for justice for women is driven by that early act of violence. In the murder trial, the male members of the jury argued that he never meant to kill her anyway, he only meant to rape her and that if she hadn't fought and screamed he would not have strangled her. When women try to claim bodily integrity they often place their lives in jeopardy. Although I continue to be a major advocate for economic justice I do not separate gender justice from economic justice. Sexuality and reproductive rights and health, including freedom from violence, are the foundation of women's ability to engage in the political struggle against inequality and injustice, not just for women but for everyone. It is the ground on which we stand. To speak of gender based violence is not to characterize women as victims, it is our silent acceptance of this that establishes victim hood. To speak out against violence is an act of resistance and a source of empowerment. It is out of rage born of personal experience that moved the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, the Women in Black, and the less published protests of women in conflict situations in Somalia and Palestine to which your report refers. These women need support but more importantly, their leadership is important if our movements are to go beyond petitions to the UN and other governmental agencies. This experience needs to be drawn into our theorizing so that the links between patriarchal definitions of masculinity and femininity are more clearly understood. We also have to draw men into our advocacy against violence. I believe the UN has started to do this, UNICEF, I think, has organized a group of men against gender-based violence. Men are after all the chief victims of male violence and wars. But present conjunctures highlights the links between sexism, racism and imperialism and calls urgently for strategies to address these and for a new dialogue and new partnerships between men and women who seek global justice.

And finally, the integration of feminist voices into post conflict situations and peace movements. Women are always represented, a significant proportion of those engaged in peace movements. However, it is not clear to me that they've brought a feminist analysis of patriarchy into these movements. In any event, as a result of our work over the past 30 years, we now know much more about the links between sexism, racism, class and imperialism and war and conflict. And this needs to be reflected in peace movements. Peace movements also need to be link more explicitly to those that advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Although most wars are about the struggle for control of resources, the methods and practices of war are deeply gendered.

So I am calling for a redefinition of the goals of the women's movement, no less. As we seek more meaningful partnerships with men in redefining women security, we need to see ourselves as in the vanguard of a larger movement of men and women, as scholars and activists towards gender equality and women's empowerment, capable of giving political voice to a redefinition of human security that can link freedom from fear and freedom from want and both with our gender relations. I want to end this presentation by returning to the themes of the UN Decade for Women, the themes of equality, development and peace. We can think of these themes as representing different emphasis or approaches to women's agency.

The theme of equality emphasizes a justice approach. Women represent 50% of the population and it is only just that they should be treated as equals. This approach uses the law to enforce equality.

The theme of development is an expediency approach. The achievement of the goal of socio-economic development requires investing in women's capacities. This approach focuses on public policy.

The theme of peace speaks to a wisdom approach. Women's agency is crucial if we want a more humane and harmonious world. This approach requires political voice, the commitment and activism of the women's movement. The wisdom approach brings us closer to challenging the asymmetric relations of power between men and women. We must seek it if we are to strive for justice in an unequal world. Without challenging patriarchy, masculism, militarism, the goals of equality that develop into peace remain unachievable.

During this past week many of us have realized the need for new approaches and strategies to achieve our goals. As we witness the disproportionate time and energy that had to be devoted to the struggle to protect themes we had made 10 years ago. As we face the fact reflected in WEDO's monitoring report "Beijing Betrayed", that says our governments have failed to deliver on the commitments made in the Four World Conferences. And as we recognize the limitations of the very advances made in the areas of education, access to health and legislation, I can think of no better moment than this 30th anniversary of the decade that gave birth to a group of women's movements for gender equality and women's rights and empowerment, to rethink our strategies and rededicate ourselves to the struggle. Participants of this conference represent some of our best feminist thinking. What changes can we make to research and theorizing so that we can make a better contribution to this ongoing struggle for "a world where basic needs become basic rights and where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated, where women's values of nurturance and solidarity will characterize human relationships, where women's reproductive role will be redefined, child care will be shared by men, women and society as a whole?" (Sen and Grown, 1987)

THANK YOU.