

STATEMENT

TO THE “GENEVA COMPONENT OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT
FORUM”

- GENEVA, 30 SEPTEMBER - 1 OCTOBER

Dear Participants of the Civil Society Development Forum, let me start with greetings from Vienna and best wishes for a successful meeting.

My name is Thomas Nowotny. I am president of the Vienna Chapter of the Society for International Development, professor of political science, and a retired Austrian diplomat.

As it I cannot attend the meeting in person, the way via video was chosen, which allows me virtual presence among you. The Vienna NGO Committees thought it important to add their voice to yours, when you discuss the Outcome Document of the ECOSOC Summit and the proposals documented in the “Draft Action Points “Document that had been circulated.

Like you, we applaud the establishment of the entity **UN - Women**. It augurs well, indeed, for the future of this entity that it is headed by Michelle Bachelet, former president of Chile. A person held in world – wide respect and esteem.

Under the leadership of Michelle Bachelet, the merging of several existing UN bodies in the new UN – Women entity is likely to bring progress, in particular, in the way of a stronger,

more coherent and uniform **implementation** of political and legal obligations UN member countries had assumed in the field of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Obviously - and as has been highlighted in the “Draft Action Points” and as we will certainly also discuss in the CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT FORUM - we face difficulties in translating political and legal commitments into actual, measurable progress on the ground. This is reflected too, in data on the implementation of the gender related **millennium developments goals**.

We may, for example register progress – though sometimes a slow and incomplete one – in the realm of the education of girls and women. In the realm of secondary and tertiary education in particular, this progress has been rather rapid on the average. But a glaring gap exists between these achievements and the very, very slow progress – or near standstill, in the economic and political empowerment of women. The political, world – wide consensus on such goals is important: It even is essential. But that consensus has to be underpinned by actual political, social and economic developments that lead up to these goals.

10 years ago we heard the promise of reaching the Millennium Development Goals. Last week we learned about the 50-50-50 verdict. The International Community should not repeat promises but put all efforts into actually reaching the targets.

Worldwide consensus on gender related goals and the activities of local elites can somewhat influence progress towards these goals. Nonetheless, such movements would atrophy were they not grounded in the reality of a given society and promoted by the actually existing forces

that drive societal change. Societal groups have to be hauled on board. The involvement of Non - Governmental Organizations is thus essential.

Certain Monitoring Mechanisms concerning UN Conventions already exist and Civil Society puts forward “Shadow Reports” in order to draw attention to inadequacies and violation of the legal and political commitments of UN Member States. But this role of Civil Society could be enhanced together with a general broadening and deepening of other mechanisms of monitoring and benchmarking

The success in meeting the MDGs is uneven between the regions of the world, and it is uneven between the various set of indicators. Take for example the case of maternal health. This is a field where results are very disappointing. Whereas in other fields, such as the average reduction of poverty, one is about to meet the targets. Looking closer at the figures, we note the huge disparity in maternal health that exists even in the same poor country between those who are wealthy and those who are not. The same holds true for the education of girls. Here too, a huge gap exists between the wealthier and the poorer parts of society. Education and health can be considered as key factors for sustainable development of a country. There is a direct correlation between the state of education of girls and women and the state of public health and economic performance. Inequality in income and wealth is thus a major obstacle in meeting the Millennium Development Goal; and specifically those goals that are gender related.

With its heavy impact not just on such tangibles, but, furthermore, on the whole well being and working of societies, *inequality as such should be measured and such indicators should*

become included as part of all those indicators that measure progress towards a world without misery.

The burden of stark inequality affects women foremost; and it is via women that this burden is being passed from one generation to the next one. We therefore should take note of recent success in tackling that core issue via programs such as the – now widely copied – Brazilian “**Bolsa familia**”. Pointing to positive examples is just as necessary as pointing to existing deficits.

With this, let me return to the “Draft Action Points”. The Vienna NGO Community very much appreciates and supports the emphasis given in it to the issue of **migrant female workers employed as domestic helpers and in other low paid jobs**. The injustices, exploitation, the suffering and the gross violation of simple human dignity call for renewed efforts to drag this issue into the full lime – light of global attention and action.

Thank you for your attention.