



**Women's Foreign Policy Group
United Nations Study Visit
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Luncheon: Keynote Address

Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro
Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations

Gillian Sorensen: Ladies and gentlemen, hope you've enjoyed your lunch. The best is yet to come. I have the pleasure of introducing to you the Deputy Secretary-General, Asha-Rose Migiro. For 50 years, the United Nations had no Deputy Secretary-General. All the burden fell on the Secretary-General himself. But twelve years ago, under Kofi Annan, it was decided that help was needed and the burden could be shared by having someone who could help shoulder the burden and who also would represent another part of the world in those high deliberations. Asha-Rose Migiro was named by the current Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon. She is a lawyer by training. She has been the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tanzania. She was also the chair of the Southern African Development Community. So she has moved from academic life, to political life, to diplomatic life. Madam Deputy Secretary-General, we welcome you here and thank you for your leadership and for joining us today.

Dr. Migiro: Thank you very much for that introduction. Dear friends, ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed an honor for me to be here to speak with you about major global problems and their impact on women. And, beyond that, I want to talk about the impact women can have on addressing these concerns.

Dear friends, right now, the international community is faced with an unprecedented rise of food prices, which is drawing many developing countries into a real crisis that is threatening further efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

The advances we have seen in achieving this collective vision for a better world could all be undermined by rising food prices. People are taking to the streets in protest from Afghanistan to Burkina Faso, from Egypt to Haiti, from Niger to Sri Lanka. The World Bank estimates that rising food costs could push one hundred million people deeper into poverty.

Families that don't have enough to eat are being forced to make terrible choices. Like deciding between food or medicine, when nutrition is a key part of healing. Or choosing

whether to send their children to class to learn – or to the fields where they might earn a bit of money to help the family.

And it's women who are hit the hardest. The development emergency engulfing whole communities is taking its heaviest toll on women.

Climate change wreaks the worst havoc in the poorest states, which have the fewest resources to respond. Poor women are responsible for a tiny fraction of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, but they suffer most from the effects of global warming. These women depend on natural resources to provide food and water to their families. They suffer the most from droughts, floods, crop failures and water shortages.

The crisis is acute in Africa, where mothers and infants struggle to survive. Not a single African country is on track to meet the Goal for reducing maternal mortality rates. And the continent is lagging behind in other areas as well. Secretary-General Ban [Ki-moon](#) knows we have to act. That's why he set up the MDG Africa Steering Group made up of leaders from major multilateral political and financial institutions. The Group is putting forward fresh proposals for progress. Recognizing the need to help Africa's mothers, it is calling for reproductive health care for everyone in need.

More broadly, this Group is advocating a “Green Revolution” across Africa. The continent desperately needs this transformation. The call for an African “Green Revolution” is even more urgent as we try to tackle the food crisis. Poor farmers in Africa are not benefiting from the inflation. They can't afford to pay for fertilizer, seeds and other supplies that cost so much more because of today's high oil prices.

The Secretary-General has pointed out that this challenging situation offers an opportunity to re-invest in agriculture in Africa. He told an audience this week in Geneva that African nations can double agricultural production over a few years. There will also be a need to improve basic infrastructure so that access to food can be made easier.

Dear friends, helping African farmers can have a decisive impact on women's lives. By and large it is women who are out there under the hot sun, tending the fields and harvesting the crops. 80% of Africa's farmers are women, and they rarely – if ever – have any control over how their land is used.

But the same women hit hardest by the food crisis are ready to hit back. They can move their communities from subsistence farming to commercial farming and even industry. With support – the support that they deserve.

Equal access doesn't just happen: it needs to be a central part of the design of agricultural policies and programs.

The Africa MDG Steering Group estimates that with investments of just eight billion dollars yearly to 2010 we can see tremendous gains. With the right mix of policies, aid

and incentives, with enough fertilizer and improved seeds, African nations can double agricultural yields.

And then, I predict, female farmers on the continent will unleash Africa's vast potential.

We need this for the farmers in Africa, but we also need it for the world. Our population continues to grow, and we're just not producing as much food as we consume. According to the World Bank, global food production has to grow by 50% between now and 2030 to meet the demand. So we urgently need to increase agricultural yields elsewhere and everywhere.

At the same time, the United Nations system is gathering its forces to tackle the global food problem. The Secretary-General himself is leading a new UN Task Force on the Global Food Crisis which brings together heads of UN agencies, funds and programs along with international financial institutions, experts and leading authorities from the global community.

The Task Force is aiming to have a comprehensive plan in place by the beginning of June.

Dear friends, meanwhile, the Economic and Social Council will hold a special session on the food crisis this month. And next month in Rome, there will be a High-Level Conference on Food Security. Come September, we'll have another opportunity when leaders gather in New York for a summit on the MDGs that the Secretary-General is convening, along with the President of the General Assembly.

But we're not just waiting for leaders to act. We are taking steps immediately on the ground. Just this week we saw the first public demonstration in Afghanistan against food price increases. The World Food Programme immediately responded by loaning the Government one thousand metric tons of wheat for bakeries in Kabul.

This is the Secretary-General's strategy. He said in Bern, "First, feed the hungry." We have to staunch this wound before the bleeding starts to hemorrhage. Food price riots can lead to more unrest. In some countries, this could threaten fragile security gains.

The World Food Programme requires an infusion of resources to reach those in peril. The agency needs some seven hundred and fifty-five million dollars to help millions of people who don't have enough food.

And the Food and Agriculture Organization is calling for one point seven billion dollars for an emergency initiative to provide seeds and inputs to boost production in low-income countries. Meanwhile, the United Nation's International Fund for Agricultural Development is making available an additional two hundred million dollars for poor farmers in hardest-hit countries.

Top UN officials are working together on a comprehensive, rapid-fire response. We are analyzing the situation so that we can help governments. We are drawing up support strategies. We are mobilizing international assistance.

We're also looking ahead, with plans to give governments the best information to boost agricultural production.

Dear friends, we have to help farmers and we have to adjust policies. That's why we're calling for immediate steps to address trade distortions that hurt exports from developing countries. We need to end harmful trade subsidies and we need to stop export restrictions on food.

We must deal with the structural and policy issues behind the crisis. That includes the production of biofuels, and how they affect the planet's food supply.

Once we take these measures and get farmers on a sound footing, we'll not only relieve the hunger – we'll advance other development goals. More children will attend school. Anti-retrovirals can do a better job helping HIV patients who are well-fed. Women will be empowered economically. And that can boost their political power, too.

Support has to go beyond the farms and into the legislatures. This requires better property registries. It means putting in place clear legal instruments to secure women equal rights to secure land and home ownership.

When women's property rights are secure, they will have stable incomes. This will protect them against gender-based violence. And that, in turn, will reduce their susceptibility to HIV.

As we work to address this current daunting challenge, we have to also remember our girls. The Millennium Goal for eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education was made because we know that investing in girls' education yields high returns not just for individual students but for entire societies. And when societies are more productive, they can better respond to crises.

Still, let's not stop there. We need girls in our classrooms but we also need women in public office. Ultimately, if we want to reach these ambitious development goals, women must take up leadership positions, driving policy, making decisions, and achieving results.

So far, progress has been painfully slow. The International Parliamentary Union released a study showing that the share of women lawmakers has increased by just 2% since 2005, so that women make up under 18 % overall.

Rwanda is topping the list with women taking up almost half the seats in parliament. It's just one of several countries that have emerged from conflict with strong measures to ensure that women are active in government. We've seen this in Burundi, and we've even

seen it also in Afghanistan, where, as you know, the Taliban had imposed some of the most oppressive measures against women in our time.

As long as I am among you, among friends, I want to self-reflect for a moment. I want to be honest about how the United Nations is doing. And the truth is, we could learn a lot from Rwanda on this score. At the UN, we are making good progress to implementing the legislative framework on gender parity, but we still have a long way to go.

The Secretary-General is personally committed to ensuring gender balance. He pledged this when he took office and he's kept his word. And we've been doing well on the ground, too. In Liberia, for example, the Secretary-General is represented by Ellen Margrethe Løj. We have also a number of female Deputy Representatives in the field. And we've also sent the first all-female police contingent to Liberia. The Formed Police Unit from India is showing the uniquely valuable contribution that women can make to law enforcement.

But, we need to do much more, in the UN and across the world, to empower women. Women can drive the Green Revolution in Africa. They hold the key to breaking out of the food crisis; to educating the young; to peace, progress and prosperity.

Women may suffer the most from the world's problems – but – look at that – they are also able to contribute most to its solutions. The time to act is now.

I want to thank you very much for your kind attention.

Questions and Answers

Ms. Sorensen: The Deputy Secretary-General would be happy to take a few questions. Let me lead out then and say, Madam Migiro, are you finding that you get the support within the United Nations to do the work you need to do? And tell us who defines the role of the Deputy Secretary-General? And what do you consider your priority on the list of your assignments?

Dr. Migiro: Thank you very much. Do I get the support? Yes I do, I enjoy immense support at all levels. First and foremost, the Secretary-General appointed me. I would have been surprised if he didn't give me the support – why would he appoint me? – so I enjoy his support. But also other colleagues who are helping the Secretary-General: I have with me here I can see very quickly, Under Secretary-General Akasaka of the DPI. I see a lot more others and I know that in the morning you had the occasion to listen to Bob Orr, Jane Holl Lute, Kathleen Cravero, all these are colleagues that have helped me quite a lot. They have been here before me. They know the system better. They have supported me immensely. So I enjoy that really. I enjoy that and I am very thankful to the Secretary-General and to colleagues in the Secretariat. But it is not only from them, it is also from friends like you. I have known Patricia Ellis for some time, she's been a source of great support and other interlocutors that we had. I have met associations; I have seen

women's groups in Washington. I have met students. So, on that score I want to assure you I get support.

Who defines the role? The role of the Deputy Secretary-General is defined by the resolution that was passed to establish the office. The Deputy Secretary-General is supposed to be assisting the Secretary-General but he or she is also given the responsibility of coordinating work in areas of management, development, how the Secretariat works. And I say coordinating because all these areas have lead departments. There is the Department of Management, there is the Department of Economic and Social Affairs that deals with development issues, and other departments that are very supportive like the Department of Public Information. So, we're working together and in all these areas that I assist the Secretary-General in, I have to get support from others. I'm also responsible for coordinating gender issues and women's empowerment issues. But there is of course the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues. There is the DPKO, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which also has a big component of issues relating to gender and women's empowerment. So all these define my work but in my responsibilities as Deputy Secretary-General, I help the Secretary-General by coordinating, by pulling together all these efforts, so that together, we can advise him, we can give him counsel, we can give him the support that he needs.

I have priorities that are also of great concern to the member states but also to the entire community that has a stake in the work of the United Nations. We have been asked to have an organization that is effective, that is transparent, that is efficient, and that is versatile. So that is one of my priorities because I believe that it is in this way that we can deliver on the monies that have been entrusted upon us. But we have development, this is critical. The United Nations preoccupies itself with security and peace issues and human rights. But these are not possible if there is no development. They compliment each other. So development is another area of key priority. And most – but not the only – issues relating to gender and to women's empowerment. We all do know that women make up more than half the population in many countries. But again, for historic reasons, for cultural reasons, for whatever, women have been left behind and there we have a challenge. The United Nations in its charter talks about equality and dignity of people. So this is an area also where we have to pay attention. So working together from within the Secretariat and within departments and programs, we also seek to address these issues. Not only on their own merit but also as they relate to the blueprint for development, which is the MDGs, the Millennium Development Goals. The goal that relates to gender equality is a platform where all other goals will get their push and support. So these are basically my priorities which are the priorities of the Secretary-General.

Question: Madam Deputy Secretary-General, I think you also have a very important role in NGOs here and would you just tell us a little bit about that?

Dr. Migiro: Thank you very much. The second question, the gentleman here is asking about NGOs. The NGOs are an important partner of the United Nations and in the office of the Secretary-General we are also coordinating that. We are working with the UN office that deals with foundations and partnerships and they have been of great support.

Recently we had a meeting of the UN Foundation here and they compliment the work that the United Nations is doing in a very practical way with less bureaucracy in all the areas: in peace, security, and human rights, above all, in MDGs. So that is also important and we cannot be successful without their support. We work with governments but again, given the way that NGOs work, given the way foundations work, it is even faster when there is this collaboration and we can realize the objectives for which the United Nations stands for so I am very thankful that you have been able to point this out.

Question: Actually, I should identify myself, I represent Rotary International and our foundation.

Dr. Migiro: Very good, very good. It is not only in my position as Deputy Secretary-General, that I appreciate how much NGOs and foundations and Rotary International can do. Even from my own country I know, government activities have very much been supported. They have a very big contribution, Rotary International, Lion Clubs International, so I know about this. Having initially also, served in my government as Minister for Community Development, I had a lot to do with NGOs, civil societies, and international organizations like the one you represent. And the Rotary Club International has been very helpful in dealing with health-related issues, education, water, and sanitation. So I'm very much aware of that and the Secretary-General always reminds us of the need to explore ways of creating synergy between what we are doing and what the foundations, international organizations can do together with us so I appreciate you reminding me of that. Thank you.

Brigitta Blaha: Brigitta Blaha, Consul General of Austria in New York. We have heard, but not enough, about ongoing UN reforms to make it more adaptable to the political situation at this time, compared to when it was founded. Which, according to you, are the most important things to tackle?

Dr. Migiro: Okay, the question is about reforms we have been doing and how these reforms will help tackle the political problems of the time. So we have reforms at different levels. We have reforms that relate to the work the Secretariat does in terms of servicing the member states, in terms of delivering in the field but this also includes reforms in the political area. So far the Secretary-General has submitted before member states realignment strengthening the Department of Political Affairs so that we can respond to the challenges all the time more swiftly. And the idea is to ensure that we have strengthened offices, particularly regionally, that can deal with the problems there, where we can do preventative diplomacy rather than reacting where the situation has gone bad on the ground. This is the area of reform that relates to response to issues of a political nature. But we also have reforms to strengthen the work staff, to have more mobility within the organization, so that you can have people going into the field, those in the field coming to the headquarters, and addressing the various challenges that we have. But we also have reforms that relate to the way we deal with the resources, not only human, but the resources that we get from member states. So we are working for more accountability, we are working for more transparency, and also oversight activities. We have reforms in all these areas.

Dr. Blaha: What about the Security Council?

Dr. Migiro: The Security Council reform is not a reform that the Secretary-General leads or does anything with. This is a member state driven reform and I know that the President of the General Assembly has picked facilitators, I think, to gather ideas, to gather opinions from the different groups as to what they see the Security Council should look like. So the Secretary-General is following closely and is awaiting the signal from the member states but it is a member state driven process, it is not something that we really work on from the Secretariat. But he believes in a strong Security Council. He believes in a Security Council that will be able to serve the interests of the entire membership as a general principle. But he waits for the signal from the member states.

Ms. Sorensen: Your colleague, the Under Secretary-General for DPI on this subject, asked me to mention that if you go into the UN website, www.un.org and then look at “Renewing United Nations” you’ll find a rich resource on reform and all the progress that’s been made.

Dr. Migiro: Thank you very much and this is testimony to one way the office of the DSG is supported by other people. (*Laughter and applause*).

Question: Peggy Blumenthal from the Institute of International Education, I don’t know whether you’re too diplomatic to answer this question but let me ask you speaking from the position of the United States, are there ways that the U.S. Mission to the UN can be more supportive of this issue of women’s empowerment in terms of ways that organizations like ours can communicate to our administration what we wish were more forceful efforts.

Dr. Migiro: I’m just going to tell you the truth. I’m not going to be diplomatic about it. (*Laughter*). Luckily I have worked very well with the U.S. Mission to the UN. When I came here the position of Permanent Representative was open. But I had the privilege of meeting first Ambassador Alex Wolff and then I also met Ms. Kristen Silverberg – so these two. And we discussed, among other things, the question of women’s empowerment, gender equality, especially at the Secretariat. But apart from that, I have been privileged also to be a member of the Women Leaders' Working Group, which is led by Dr. Rice so we discuss these issues. I was a member before, in my previous capacity, but they have been very kind to invite me always when they met. And I have also worked closely with her advisor, Ambassador Shirin Tahir-Kheli, so I can say I am getting all this support and we have a number of strategies. But because there are men here around, those strategies may not be very favorable to share so I’ll keep them to myself but I can whisper them to you. (*Laughter*). What I can ensure you is that the way the Secretary-General has worked with me as I reach between these two, between the nation and us, we have been able to have these appointments. But your group can help us. You can help us, as I said, by looking at what we are doing. And I’m glad that Under Secretary-General Akasaka has given us this link. It will show what we are doing to renew the UN. You can have a peek at that. If we are not clear enough on what we are

doing on this front, you can tell me straight, you can write to the Secretary-General, you can work with us. This is one way. But another way is to share with us, even informally, the names of capable women you may know from the United States, from outside the United States – this will help us. Because, what we hear always is that, the women are not there. But nobody is looking. How is it that we always identify capable men but we fail to identify capable women out there? So we can work in that area as well and I welcome that personally, and I'm sure that the Secretary-General will be very happy to receive this.

Question: You spoke earlier on how progress of having women in power throughout the world in leadership positions in their own countries has been very slow. And I'd love to hear, from your perspective, what we need to do to accelerate that movement.

Dr. Migiro: Maybe first we can tell you what the UN is doing and then we can see how you can support what the UN is doing. We have the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues, which under the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is working on the development of normative related issues, looking at the conventions, looking at the instruments and working with governments to ensure that they have these. If it is a question of signing, they have signed; if it is a question of ratifying, they have ratified. We have the Division for the Advancement of Women, which also supports; we have UNIFEM, which is doing a lot of work in the field to help countries, to help groups, to address women-related issues; we have the Institute of Research and Training, which does the research and brings it to bear on governments and countries so they can develop these into policies.

How can you help? You can help by working with us through these entities. You can also help by working bilaterally with governments. There are governments that need capacity building, in terms of helping them to understand what the instruments work for, in terms of preparing the governments to ratify and sign the various instruments, but also empowering women's groups. As I mentioned in my statement, there are women out there who are working very hard in the field, they are working on entrepreneurship and so on. And also investment: through this forum, through this organization, you can work together, particularly with the private sector to address some of the development challenges that are facing countries. This would be in the area of policy, or even in practical ways. We have challenges in maternal health, in infant mortality, access to water and sanitization. The private foundations – like Rotary International – can help. And you can work together to give them this push. You can even have a few countries that you can use as models, whose success can be replicated. All these ways can be explored.

We have the Office for International Partnerships which is under the auspices of the DSG. We also invite you to work with us to see where your support can be directed.

Ms. Sorensen: Thank you very much. Please join me in thanking this extraordinary leader, Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro.