



2014 International Women's Day Statement from Helen Clark

This year's International Women's Day theme – *Equality for Women is Progress for All* – states a simple truth. No country will reach its full potential if its female citizens do not enjoy full equality. As the 2015 end date of the Millennium Development Goals nears, and as discussion on the next global development agenda intensifies, there is strong momentum for achieving development with equity, including by eradicating gender inequality and empowering women and girls.

Next week, the 58th UN Commission on the Status of Women will convene in New York. Its discussions will focus on “Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls.” While there has, undoubtedly, been progress for many women and girls, it has been uneven and too slow. The world has officially achieved gender parity in primary education, but regional gaps persist and girls' enrolment drops off at the secondary level. The proportion of women in national parliaments has grown, but women still comprise around only 21 per cent of the world's parliamentarians. Lagging farthest behind is MDG 5, which focuses on reducing maternal mortality and achieving universal access to reproductive health care.



*Au service
des peuples
et des nations*

Grounded in international human rights, gender equality doesn't just improve the lives of individual women, girls, and their families; it makes economic sense, strengthens democracy, and enables long-term sustainable progress.

Women with even some education **tend to have** fewer and healthier children, better economic opportunities, and **to be** more likely to ensure that their own children go to school. One of the findings of UNDP's 2013 Human Development Report was that a mother's education is more important to child survival than are household income or wealth.

Access to sexual and reproductive health services enables women to plan their families and expand their opportunities, and it also helps prevent maternal and child mortality.

Making sure that women farmers have equal access to agricultural resources boosts women's incomes and status, and has a positive impact on a country's agricultural sectors.

Let's mark this International Women's Day by redoubling our efforts to make equality for women a reality. That means ensuring that women have access to education and resources, decent work, and equal pay. It means removing the structural barriers -- the discriminatory laws and institutions, and gender stereotypes and practices -- which



prevent women from fulfilling their economic, social and political rights. It means getting more women into political office and ensuring that women have a voice in the decisions which affect their lives – in households and communities, in government and other sectors, and at peace-keeping tables. It means ensuring that women have freedom from violence, access to health care, and the ability to make their own sexual and reproductive health choices.

The need to address such inequalities came up consistently in the UN-led consultations on the post-2015 development framework. In the MyWorldSurvey, education, health care and job opportunities – all so central to women’s empowerment - are top priorities for the more than 1.4 million people who have voted worldwide. In an e-discussion organized by UNDP, one contributor highlighted the importance of gender equality this way: “A society that fails its women and girls ultimately fails itself.”

Let’s commit ourselves to investing our time and resources in all aspects of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Only then can we fulfill the rights of all women and men, and create a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient world.