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International Council of Nurses

Issues a Strong Call for an Effective, Funded UN Agency for Women

Geneva, Switzerland, 9 June 2006 - As the global representative of the world's 13 million nurses, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) is adding its voice to the widespread and growing demand for an effective, funded international women's agency, able to redress the unacceptable lack of gender equality worldwide and the exclusion of women from decision making at almost every level. ICN encourages its member national nurses associations to lobby their government representatives and to press the ongoing United Nations Coherence Panel* to establish a women's agency as an urgent priority.

The Coherence Panel, key in establishing reform of the UN's operational work, is mandated by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to identify how gender equality can be more fully addressed in the work of the UN. As such, the Panel provides a unique opportunity to establish a women-specific agency, with sufficient resources, power and authority to have a real impact on the condition of women and girls worldwide. The Panel will deliver its recommendations to the UN General Assembly in September.

"Poverty, inequitable relationships between men and women, poor access to health care, inadequate education, violence and a variety of social, economic, political and cultural factors adversely affect the health and well-being of millions of women and girls worldwide" stated Hiroko Minami, President of ICN. "The need for a women's agency to address these issues is obvious and its creation long overdue. As powerful advocates for the rights and health of women and girls, nurses everywhere can make their voices heard on this now."

While women worldwide are overwhelmingly poorer, more likely to be victims of violence and lacking power in virtually all societies, nowhere is the failure to establish women's rights more tragically evident than in the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Fundamental gender inequalities fuel the epidemic, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where women and girls now make up over 60% of those living with HIV and 76% of those in the 15-24 years of age group.

ICN joins leaders in health and human rights from every region in insisting on a high priority for the establishment of a strong, women-specific machinery within the UN. Time is short. Organizations, governments and individuals can take advantage of the opportunity presented by the Coherence Panel to ensure that the UN reform achieves the gender goals it espouses.

* UN High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment. The 15 members include Shaukat Aziz (Co-Chair), Prime Minister, Pakistan; Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, United Kingdom; Luísa Dias Diogo (Co-Chair), Prime Minister, Mozambique; Mohamed T. El-Ashry, Egypt Senior Fellow, United Nations Foundation; Robert Greenhill,

President of the Canadian International Development Agency, Canada; Ruth Jacoby, Director-General for Development Cooperation,, Sweden; Ricardo Lagos Escobar; President of the Republic of Chile; Louis Michel, Belgium, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid; Benjamin W. Mkapa, Former President, United Republic of Tanzania; Jean-Michel Severino, France, Director General, French Development Agency; Josette S. Shiner Under Secretary for Economic, Business and Agricultural Affairs, United States of America; Jens Stoltenberg, (Co-Chair), Prime Minister, Norway; Keizo Takemi, Member of the House of Councillors, Japan; Kemal Derviş, Turkey, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); Lennart Båge, Sweden, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

Editor's Note

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is a federation of 129 national nurses' associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses for nurses since 1899, ICN is the international voice of nursing and works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally.

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