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London SW1A 2AH

From The Minister of State

The Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP
House of Commons
London
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Dear Tessa,

Thank you for your letter of 21 May on behalf of your constituents, about the proposed establishment of a new Women's Agency at the United Nations.

As you are probably aware, one of the recommendations of the UN High Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence in November 2006 was to establish a new gender entity. The idea behind it was to address the fragmented approach to gender issues by the UN system, and to realise a more coherent, coordinated and effective response to the empowerment of women.

The UK, like many EU countries, is a strong supporter of this recommendation. Unfortunately, we were not able to reach an agreement in the General Assembly to establish a new gender entity last year, but we are hopeful that we will reach agreement in 2009.

In March, the UN Secretariat, on request from Member States, produced a paper that outlined institutional options in more detail. The UK was pleased to see that the UN clearly urged member states to support a 'composite' entity which would combine all of the existing UN gender-related bodies. That said, there remain a number of areas of detail that require some clarification before formal agreement can be reached.

The UK is working closely with the UN system (both in New York and at country level), and a number of member states, to urgently clarify some of these outstanding issues. We remain optimistic that we can help alleviate any concerns in the short-term and pave the way for a decision soon.

UK Ministers regularly raise this issue with UN leaders, and the UK Mission to the UN in New York is working closely with other delegations to create the right environment for an intergovernmental agreement in the current session of the UN General Assembly.



I am sure you will agree that the current global economic environment presents unprecedented challenges for the world's women. For this reason, the UK is urging our partners to see the urgency of a coherent UN response, and agree to these reforms.

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The Rt Hon Lord Malloch-Brown
Minister for State