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NAWO held a meeting of women's organisations and members at Fawcett on November 17 2010 to discuss a possible new gender architecture for the UK after WNC is no longer.....

The attached document (updated now, 28 November, with some comments received) was produced within 24 hours and sent to the Ministers and to the GEO over the signatures of NAWO, Fawcett and the WRC, ahead of the GEO meeting about CEDAW and a new architecture held on November 22nd.

This document is a work in progress - we need as many women's organisations and interested women to respond so we may incorporate comments and prepare a model in time for the GEO major consultation to be held in the New Year.

We also think that we in the women's sector need to talk together about what we can do to reorganise, to use/develop the structures we have in order to communicate and work effectively without the strength of the co-ordination of the WNC. There are umbrellas in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland and there is also the UK Joint Committee on Women that is the UK coordinating group for the European Women's Lobby; for the moment Wales does not have a group voice.

DRAFT

Outcome of meeting of Women's Organisations and individual women called by NAWO, the National Alliance of Women's Organisations, and held at Fawcett on November 17 2010 to consider a new gender architecture for the UK government in the absence of the Women's National Commission (WNC) and in the context of serious financial restrictions.

Updated following comments received and the meeting held by GEO on November 22 at which a gender architecture was discussed in the context of CEDAW.

A. Context

1. 21 women representing between them 17 women's organisations which in turn have many hundreds of members, were present and there were 17 apologies. The meeting does not pretend to be representative of all women's organisations and clearly not of all women. However, women's organisations offer pathways and networks to the whole range of diverse women across the UK.
2. This note is a **draft** presenting the ideas that came out of the meeting. The plan is to consult as widely as possible on them so that we can arrive at a consensus which we hope will provide practical and best practice proposals to the government. *Inter alia* we plan an engagement process which is as inclusive as possible reaching out to organisations old and new representing the full range - issue-based and faith-based; infrastructure; service; professional and campaigning groups from diverse backgrounds, but also going beyond traditional ideas of the women's sector to new web-based developments which, in particular, are exciting mainly younger women. We intend to ensure the 4 nations of the UK are equally represented. Wales, but not Northern Ireland and Scotland, had a voice at this meeting.
3. The meeting focused on the mechanisms needed for gender equality to be progressed across the board in government and to meet the expressed wishes of the Ministers for Equality and Women to work within the context of CEDAW (the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women) and to have direct contact with women's organisations and women generally.
4. The meeting began by noting the requirements set out in the Beijing Platform for Action for governments to establish/improve national machineries for gender equality and mechanisms for relating to and involving women's NGOs in policy development and monitoring. It also had before it the Government Equalities Office (GEO's) statement in its Equality Impact Assessment of the WNC about possible developments under the general heading of UK Women to develop consultation with women and take over the tasks and functions of the WNC. Finally, various other national mechanisms were presented as worth while or not worth while models to consider. In particular, Australia has recently set up new mechanisms which were considered important possible models, as has the USA with its White House Council for Women and Girls.

5. The meeting offered a starting point for discussions to take place about the ways in which government might:
 - a. Set up arrangements to consult with women's organisations, individual women and other stakeholders to create a National Equality Plan, as specified under CEDAW.
 - b. Establish stakeholder consultative groups within each department /Ministry of government to implement gender equality policies and monitor outcomes.
6. Gender mainstreaming; gender impact assessment and gender budgeting were all seen as crucial tools that are required at every level of policy making and implementation. It was also hoped the Gender Equality Duty as part of the Single Equality Duty under the Equality Act would remain a vital aspect of the work of public bodies, including government.

B. Outcome plans

1. **A National Action Plan for women's equality and rights under CEDAW**
CEDAW requires a National Action Plan to be developed by governments with the involvement of women's organisations. The Beijing Platform for Action specifies that national machinery to be effective must be placed at the most senior levels of government. The meeting therefore asks that **10 Downing Street take responsibility with the Ministers for Equality and Women and their offices for the development of a National Action Plan (NAP) under the responsibility placed on the UK by CEDAW.**
2. **Involvement of women's organisations and Stakeholders at highest level.**
The development of the NAP requires the involvement of Stakeholders - principally women's organisations. This might be provided by a group or Forum of Stakeholders tasked with working with officials to co-ordinate the groups to be established in each Ministry (see below, 3). The meeting asks that such a group be resourced to participate.¹
2. The meeting noted and welcomed the fact that there is a **cross-Whitehall Ministerial Group on Equality** that meets twice a year. It should be charged with implementation plans and monitoring of the NAP. The focal point for gender equality at official cross-Whitehall level might be placed in 10 Downing Street or within the Cabinet Office.
3. **Gender equality experts/gender focal points in every Department and Ministry of Government to be set up and required to meet with Stakeholders**
Two examples - the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and the Department for International Development (DfID) with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) were noted as already having within them task forces or groups that met regularly (once a month) with Stakeholders including and/or specifically related to gender

¹ The meeting was interested in the USA's current model - a White House Council for Women and Girls that in fact consists of Secretaries of State from all Departments. The idea of this forum was similar but consisting of Stakeholders.

equality and impact assessment. The meeting proposed that every department and Ministry of government should follow this model and set up Stakeholder groups to work with the named gender-expert officials and participate in 'gender mainstreaming' of policy making and implementation. The members might include individual gender experts/academics as well as representatives of women's organisations with expertise in the areas. These groups need resourcing to participate. The work of these groups feeds into the Cross-Whitehall Ministerial Equality group.

4. Wider participation - Big Society

In order to widen participation and in line with the objectives of the Big Society, the government should fund outreach for wider consultation, possibly around specific themes or areas of concern. [NB groups linked by issues such as VAWG have also met to consider the future without a WNC.] Examples include: violence against women; women in decision making; local issues - rural women, for example; Black, Asian and minority ethnic and refugee women (BAMER), disabled and other special issues; CEDAW and other international issues (Australian model).

5. Training and use of Community Organisers

To achieve this the 5,000 community organisers due to be working in communities around the country should be well trained by existing specialists, many of whom are to be found within women's organisations, in gender awareness and impact assessment. Part of their work should be to enable existing grass roots organisations in the areas to come together and discuss issues at a local level. **But there is a need for capacity-building - a skill already extant and in use - for the women's sector to participate with pro-active mechanisms.** A range of networks also already exist (such as the Women's Resource Centre's networks) and might be the points of departure and involvement.

6. Interactive communication IT site

The meeting welcomed the idea of a comprehensive interactive communication IT platform enabling women to communicate together as well as consult with government on policy both domestically and internationally. This must be well resourced to enable participation and accessibility and the relevant Government Department must take responsibility for keeping it up-to-date to ensure that it is a useful and well-used tool in the long-term.

7. Bridging the Gaps - Coordination required

There is a clear need for regional and national representation structures. Different patterns exist and will develop further across the country - communication and co-ordination is essential. The meeting was interested in further ideas and discussion with government on mechanisms that could incorporate the voices of both individual women and organisations at local, regional, national and possibly European and international levels.

8. Evaluation

It is vital to know what impact and changes in policy follow consultation/engagement, that is, to see outcomes of involvement; women's organisations must participate in monitoring and evaluation. Gender experts and consultants should be employed in evaluation and to monitor implementation across departments. Evidently, some departments (the MOD 1325 programme for example) have employed USA consultants. They are available in the UK. The work of the Community organisers with local and community level groups should also be evaluated against the NAP standards.

9. More work/discussion

The meeting expressed specific concerns which need further discussion:

- (a) about the future plans for CEDAW reporting as far as Shadow/Alternative reports especially are concerned although current plans are being developed for 2011
- (b) about work at CSW and before and afterwards, both as needed immediately and in the future
- (c) about all international work including work on and with Europe
- (d) about where responsibility falls - it is the government's responsibility to consult widely - reaching more marginal groups and individuals
- (e) and about the name proposed by the GEO, 'UK Women', which some felt might be confused with 'UN Women' especially since UNIFEM (UK) on January 1 becomes 'UN Women (UK)'.

ENDS

NAWO, November 28 2010