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### **International Women's Day 2008**

UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon sent a key message to the international community in commemorating this year's International Women's Day.

"This year we find ourselves at the mid-point in the race to reach the Millennium Development Goals by the target date of 2015. Only by investing in the world's women and girls can we expect to reach our destination," he said. "On this International Women's Day, let us resolve to unite in this mission."

In Sudan, where women have borne the brunt of conflict for many years, there has also been a positive development in women's empowerment. A Sudanese woman became one of Africa's first female parliamentarians in 1964. Five years later, Sudanese women achieved the rights of "equal pay for equal work" as well as "full equality in job opportunities and all working conditions".

The Government of National Unity has started a process of law reform to bring all national laws into conformity with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Interim National Constitution, providing an opportunity to address gaps in the protection of women's human rights.

It is equally positive to witness the GNU's decisive action in eradicating the harmful and violating practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), which today is still endangering the lives of nearly 70 per cent of women in the northern states of Sudan. Leading government figures, academics and religious leaders have made clear that FGM has no basis in Sudan's religious or social traditions and the UN family echoes this sentiment.

In Southern Sudan, the high illiteracy rate among women made it difficult to achieve the 25% target for representation by women at all levels of government. But the Government of Southern Sudan, reaffirming its commitment to women's empowerment, appointed two women ministers and selected five other women to chair the newly-created Commissions.

It has become conventional wisdom that 'progress for women, is progress for all', but a lot of efforts are still needed around the world to realize this progress. The 10-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action around the world revealed a serious gap between policy and practice in many countries. A lack of political will is reflected in the most telling way of all: lack of resources and insufficient budgetary allocations. That is why the theme of this year's International Women's Day is "Investing in Women and Girls".

Making an effort to invest in women and girls will result in a multiplier effect on productivity and sustained economic growth. No measure is more important in advancing education and health, improving nutrition, or reducing infant and maternal mortality.

**Editor's Note:** UNMIS is marking International Women's Day (08 March 2008) at the Ahfad University for Women, Omdurman, Khartoum. The event will begin at 19:30 and include addresses by the University President and the UNMIS Principal Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary-General. All media are invited to attend.

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