The empowerment of women is not only a fundamental objective in its own right. It is essential to address the range of complex challenges before us – from instability and conflict, poverty and hunger, to environmental degradation and climate change. Gender equality is at once a key MDG and a prerequisite for achieving all the Goals together.
The Charter of the United Nations, signed in San Francisco, United States, in 1945, was the first international agreement to proclaim gender equality as a fundamental human right. Since then, the Organization has helped move women’s empowerment forward through internationally agreed strategies, standards, programmes and goals to advance the status of women worldwide.

Over the years, United Nations action for the advancement of women has taken four directions: promotion of legal measures; mobilization of public opinion and international action; training and research, including the compilation of gender desegregated statistics; and direct assistance to disadvantaged groups. Today, a central organizing principle of the work of the United Nations is that no enduring solution to society’s most threatening social, economic and political problems can be found without the full participation and full empowerment of the world’s women.

The year 2010 marked the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, as well as the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in which States committed themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women. It was also the year of the tenth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, which in particular emphasizes the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction. It stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

In a historic move, the General Assembly voted unanimously on 2 July 2010 to create a new entity to accelerate progress in meeting the needs of women and girls worldwide and to provide stronger leadership, greater accountability and more resources in this critical area. The establishment of “UN Women” is part of the United Nations reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact, making it an important entity of the United Nations Secretariat. On 14 September 2010, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of Ms. Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile, as the Under-Secretary-General for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

Within this framework, the Secretary-General made the empowerment of women a strategic priority for 2010. The empowerment of women and advancing towards gender equality is a collective task that can only be realized through a firm partnership with all stakeholders, and UNOG worked throughout the year in support of this overall objective.

Celebrating International Women’s Day

In December 1977, the General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming a United Nations Day for Women’s Rights and International Peace to be observed on any day of the year by Member States, in accordance with their historical and national traditions. In adopting the resolution, the Assembly recognized the role of women in peace efforts and development, and urged an end to discrimination and an increase in support for women’s full and equal participation.

In recognition of the adoption of the resolution, the theme of this year’s International Women’s Day, which was observed worldwide on 8 March, was “Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities: Progress for All”.

Despite progress, women and girls continue to have unequal access to education, health care, food, jobs, property and decision-making. We can only confront these shameful realities when we are frank and direct. At a practical, local level, women are working to address challenges that affect us all – from violent conflict and instability, to development and climate change. It is our collective responsibility to enable this potential to be tapped for our common good.

Director-General’s remarks on International Women’s Day (8 March 2010).
On 8 March, UNOG and the Permanent Mission of France organized an event at the Palais des Nations to mark International Women’s Day, with the participation of 250 people including diplomats, dignitaries, representatives of the United Nations family, NGOs and staff members.

The event was entitled “A world in crisis: women enabling change” (Les femmes actrices de changement dans un monde en crise). It included a screening of extracts from a new documentary film by renowned French filmmaker Coline Serreau. The extracts from the film, Solutions locales pour un désordre global (“Local solutions for global disorder”), vividly illustrated some of the challenges faced by women around the world and featured concrete cases of women contributing to solving global problems, at the community level.

In addition, an audiovisual presentation on the papers of the Austrian pacifist Bertha von Suttner (1843–1914) was displayed at several locations at the Palais des Nations.

Women moving disarmament forward

On 9 March, the Conference on Disarmament heard a statement from Beatrice Fihn, representative of the Women’s League for International Peace and Freedom, on the occasion of International Women’s Day.

Within the framework of the annual consultations in the “Tripartite Plus” format, high-level representatives of the United Nations – represented by the Director-General of UNOG, the UNECE Executive Secretary and the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Kosovo, as well as representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women – OSCE and the Council of Europe, met on 14 June 2010 in Vienna. Under the theme “Gender and comprehensive security: lessons learned and possibilities for enhanced cooperation”, participants discussed prevention and resolution of conflicts through the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and combating violence against women. The tenth anniversary of the resolution represented an opportunity for collectively galvanizing partnership efforts towards its implementation.

In her statement, Ms. Fihn said that by placing gender within the United Nations mandate of maintaining international peace and security, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) had provided an important framework and context for raising gender awareness in all aspects of security and defence. As one of the most important decision-making bodies in multilateral disarmament, the Conference on Disarmament had taken a small step in implementing the resolution by allowing WILPF to pronounce itself for the first time within the Conference.

Collaborating with regional organizations in support of the empowerment of women

We need to be blunt. Ten years ago, resolution 1325 (2000) was seen by many – quite rightly – as a giant leap forward. For the first time, it gave us a foundation for addressing the particular vulnerability of women in conflict and for engaging them to overcome this vulnerability. In reality, we have moved forward with very small steps only.

Director-General’s remarks at the 2010 Tripartite Plus meeting (Vienna, 14 June 2010).
Many participants emphasized economic development as a key aspect in women’s political empowerment. It was argued that by generally limiting women’s vulnerability, economic empowerment should be a priority in post-conflict contexts as a conflict prevention measure.

All reiterated the need to combat impunity for violence against women and to address the issue of compensation. It was recalled that when women were not represented in peace negotiations, amnesties for crimes against them were likely, which laid the foundation for a continuation in post-conflict settings.

Furthermore, participants reaffirmed that violence against women is one of the most serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and is also an impediment to the achievement of gender equality, comprehensive security, and economic and social development.

Amongst other areas for further cooperation and coordination, the participants called for the integration of a gender perspective into early warning systems to improve their effectiveness; the strengthening of national networks linking government representations with NGOs and other local actors; improved monitoring of resolution 1325 (2000) and coordination in the field.

Overall, the discussions demonstrated the potential for further cooperation in implementing resolution 1325 (2000) between the United Nations and the regional organizations that participated and that have developed significant expertise in promoting gender equality, especially in the field.

It was agreed that the Council of Europe would host the 2011 high-level Tripartite meeting, which would be the twentieth in the process.

■ Engaging research and academia on the empowerment of women

UNOG and DCAF co-hosted, together with the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, a seminar entitled “Women, peace and security: from resolution to action. Ten years of Security Council resolution 1325” on 15 September 2010. The seminar was organized within the context of the tenth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000) in October 2010, with the objective of taking a critical look at its impact and progress in its implementation, and provided a timely opportunity for refocusing on the important role of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The opening keynote address by Ms. Micheline Calmy-Rey, Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, was followed by a panel discussion and informal exchanges with the invited audience of over 150 high-level representatives of the diplomatic community in Geneva, United Nations entities, NGOs and prominent think tanks. A closing keynote address by Ms. Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, concluded the debates.

In her keynote speech Ms. Calmy-Rey emphasized that the presence of women in peace negotiations and in high-level political functions continued to be an exception. She added that as long as women were not considered equal partners in the political, economic and social fields, the international community would fall short of making any progress on resolution 1325.

The Director-General commended the efforts of the countries that had completed National Action Plans for implementation of resolution 1325 and called on other countries to follow suit in fulfilling the promise of the resolution. He also reiterated the need to work for women’s empowerment generally through greater progress towards achieving MDG number 3 on gender equality.

During the discussions, the continued impunity for perpetrators of violence against women was stressed as a key obstacle to eliminating insecurity for women. Sound justice, accountability and reporting mechanisms had to be put into place to deter future acts of violence. Participants noted that progress in other areas such as access to education and maternal health had to be addressed concurrently. Panellists also underscored the importance of different social, legal and political indicators for tracking progress in the implementation of resolution 1325. The allocation of adequate resources to address the role of women in peace and security was seen as a crucial determinant of success and the need for societal change, with a shift in mindsets, was considered critical in ensuring long-term development.

In her closing keynote address, Ms. Pillay underscored women’s contributions in reconstruction and in the embedding of women’s rights in law and practice which were indispensible preconditions for peace. She highlighted
the need to develop a better system for data collection to identify women’s specific requirements in transition periods. Noting that most transitional justice scenarios were defined by gender inequality and systematic discrimination against women, the High Commissioner stressed the importance of including a gender perspective at the very beginning of a reconciliation process.

### Focusing on the role of women in cultural exchange

Both Member States and international organizations focused on the status of women across the world in 2010. Many exhibitions of paintings and photographs, from a celebration of the life of Frida Kahlo, Mexican painter famous for her depiction of the female experience and form, to the difficulties and sadness of daily existence for women in many countries, told of women’s experiences, on all continents across several generations, and of the happiness and hardship which mark their lives in peace or wartime. Several concerts by prominent female artists were also held during the year. The UNOG Cultural Activities Programme provided an important platform for the discussion of achievements in the advancement of women, and the many challenges to equality still faced by them.

### Empowering women at UNOG

UNOG also strives to promote gender equality among its staff members and has made concerted efforts to increase the representation of female staff in all categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender representation at UNOG</th>
<th>Geographical recruitments from un- and under-represented countries</th>
<th>Female staff representation in P+ categories</th>
<th>Female selections in Professional categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation as of 30 June 2009</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>On target</td>
<td>Within range</td>
<td>On target</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the Secretary-General’s focus on the empowerment of women, a staff-driven response to a need that had been expressed by many women was set up in the form of the Professional Women’s Forum. Through targeted events, the Forum provides an opportunity to learn from one another across occupational groups and levels and to create a network to share ideas on how to support the empowerment of women within the United Nations. On 25 October 2010, Ms. Angela Kane, Under-Secretary-General for Management, met with members of the Professional Women’s Forum in Geneva.