

Karen J. Smith speaks at 5th Forum on the Eradication of Poverty - Side Event of the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR)/High-Level Segment (HLS) of ECOSOC Substantive Session

Melissa Gontijo

July 3, 2012

UN Millenium Plaza Hotel, New York City



Speakers:

Ms. Lakshmi Puri -- Deputy Executive Director of UN Women and Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations

Ms. Azita Berar -- Director of the Employment Policy Department, UN International Labour Organization (ILO)

H.E. Mr. Antonio Gumende -- Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Mozambique to the United Nations

Mr. Cheick Side Diarra -- UN Under Secretary-General and High Representative, UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN OHRLLS)

Dr. Nessi Ndiva-Hill -- Professor, Essex County Community College

Dr. Karen J. Smith -- Chair of Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

Moderator: Ms. Motoko Sugiyama

As the Fifth Forum on the Eradication of Poverty marked its debut the day before the United State's national holiday, Independence Day, a growing audience of men and women filled the room. This side event of the AMR/HLG of ECOSOC co-sponsored by NGO Branch of UN DESA, UN OHRLLS, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Mozambique to the UN and Co-sponsored and Organized by WFPW International and USA welcomed delegates into the large Diplomat Ballroom with its theme "Promoting Productive Capacity, Employment and Decent work to Eradicate Poverty for Achieving the MDGs." This year's theme for AMR of HLS in Substantive Session of ECOSOC was "Promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work to eradicate poverty in the context of inclusive sustainable and equitable economic growth at all levels for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)."

Because WFWPI has been striving to eradicate poverty and achieve the MDGs through its international service projects in over 50 developing countries, the theme of the forum was aligned with the theme of the AMR exactly to support the AMR. Six accomplished panelists provided insightful and meaningful perspectives on eradication of poverty. Taking in the excited audience, Dr. Lakshmi Puri, Ms. Azita Berar, H.E. Mr. Antonio Gumende, Mr. Cheick Side Diarra, Dr. Nessi Ndiva-Hill, and Dr. Karen J. Smith, delivered topics on the involvement of UN Women, the UN International Labour Organization, the government, Civil Society and NGOs, as well as perspectives from UN OHRLLS. Each panelist contributed their unique understanding of the situation through presentations that included step by step practical solutions and examples of programs that illustrate positive impactful change.

Kicking off the three hour event, Prof. Yeon Ah Choi, Vice President of WFWP International, introduced the main theme, hot topics on issues such as young people's unemployment, solutions and areas of development. Building global peace and eradicating poverty are two main areas in which WFWPI is trying to focus their energy and support. She reminded the audience that developed and developing countries need to work hand in hand as one family.

Ms. Azita Awad delivered statistics and other visuals from the ILO that show young people worldwide are struggling to find employment. Low quality jobs and slow or uncertain transitions from school to work are holding students back from connecting to permanent jobs. One alarming statistic shows that around 75 million young people are unemployed around the world. With a warm smile and energetic personality she suggests the need for coordination and collective partnership to resolve this growing issue. She hopes that youth voices can be heard, creativity engaged, and their rights respected.

Ms. Lashmi Puri, a strong and passionate speaker, emphasized the importance of gender equality as well as the effects of women gaining rights through government and legislation. Unlocking the potential of women by recognizing them during economic growth and removing barriers to women as participants in the economy will empower them. Since poverty has become feminized, it limits women from being successful and feeling secure. Collecting data on different initiatives women have developed and nurtured, especially in rural underdeveloped parts of the world such as India, would dramatically help legislation move forward and reduce the impacts of poverty. Promoting productive capacity, employment and work will also aid in eradicating poverty.

As the ambassador of Mozambique to the UN, Mr. Antonio Gumende identifies Mozambique's five major objectives to help eradicate poverty. By increasing production in fisheries and agriculture, promoting employment creation, fostering human and social development, improving governance, and pursuing sound macroeconomic and fiscal management, Mozambique aims to decrease poverty. These efforts have had a positive impact on rural districts, especially with the help of local entrepreneurs. Speaking with sincerity, he feels that as a result, jobs have been generated, land is properly prepared for agriculture, and there is more access to credit opportunities in rural areas. Amidst international economic struggles and poor health conditions in Mozambique due to HIV/AIDS, Mozambique continues to reduce its poverty rate by 16 percent a year, with an additional one percent added every year since 2003.

In places like Mali and Madagascar for example, says Mr. Cheick Side Diarra, the unemployment rate for young people is rising. Women around the world also face challenges because of inequalities in the labor market. As a result, they are paid less for their work. He feels it will be hard to achieve any millennium goals if women are not included or given equal rights. One challenge will be job creation, especially for women. He insists their skills and talents should be used to help the economy; better incomes have even been linked to educated women. He suggests that production led policies should be flexible when implemented in different sectors, including educating on social welfare and health. Empowering national leaders to take ownership of positive change, increasing domestic production to solve local issues, and using technology can help to decrease poverty. He is confident that with concrete steps, nations can develop productive capacities, and eradicate poverty.

Dr. Nessie Ndivé-Hill conveys the power of microfinance opportunities in Cameroon to eradicating poverty. The credit union, CAMCCUL, is one example of educating members and society about money management. It helps members to be funded in hopes with loans and savings, as well as helping businesses thrive through offering low interest rates so the businesses could in turn help reduce poverty in their community. Finance education has facilitated small projects that reduce poverty and sustain future developments. She recommends reducing membership fees for poor members and using local resources to sustain the community. Her desire is for NGO's role to promote empowerment of people in society and eradication of poverty step by step.

Dr. Karen J. Smith relies on her quick and spirited speaking skills by leaving her computer aside and simply discussing the core capacity of people. What NGOs should be doing is honing in on problem solving skills, she says. Learnable tools to resolve problems should be the response to horrible situations and other unforeseen issues. Constructing solutions instead of being problem experts is what she believes to be the turning point in figuring out the right direction. People in a horrible circumstance can change the situation with basic tools or strategies because they will know the best answer for their specific case.

Closing the event, Mrs. Sugiyama held a question and answer session from the audience for the panelists. Questions addressed the roles of women during times of economic uncertainty. More topics covered young adults in unemployment, with suggestions towards maximizing their talents through technology, and also what the UN might contribute on the topic of women and children in violent war zones. The event concluded with warm applause from the audience. The discussion on poverty with step by step approaches from the panelists, as well as their personal perspectives, allowed for a productive and successful event. People continued to talk amongst themselves on the main themes and approaches as part of the wider discussion on poverty.

Fellowship Luncheon

Fellowship and networking efforts hosted by the WFWPI UN Office continued after the event at a local restaurant. This luncheon celebrated the amazing panelists and their efforts to educate about the issues of poverty, and the success of the event. Original music was performed by a guest audience member in response to the topics of the inspiring event. The festivities continued with more inspired singing and discussions.