

Dear friends

7 June 2007

This update on development issues and my activities is sent from time to time. Please feel free to forward it to anyone you think would be interested. You should let me know if you want to be taken off the mailing list. If you receive this e-mail direct from me and you wish to keep receiving it, you need to say so once every three years, as I try to find time to update this list annually to remove any people who have been silent for that time.

I begin with brief family news as I am currently on leave in Australia. Douglas, Julie and Nathan are now in living in the United Arab Emirates where Doug has been appointed a doctor at the Emirates Airlines clinic. I spent Easter with him, half way through his first two months residence, while the rest of the family were waiting for visas, and then appreciated the opportunity to break the journey to Australia by another stopover in Dubai. The family is in a villa in one of the new suburbs for Emirates staff. Built on desert sand, it has amazed me to see a grass, flower and tree garden grow around their villa within weeks. Giant desalination plants ensure a ready supply of water. In one day over Easter we visited six Emirates. During the recent World Economic Forum in Jordan, the ruler of the Mideast's booming economic capital, Dubai, launched a USD 10 billion foundation to fund education and human development in the region. Sheik Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who also serves as the oil-rich prime minister, said the money, which he donated, would be used to create research centers, support university research and distribute scholarships to students. In a speech before the WEF he noted that 18 percent of people under 15 in the Mideast are illiterate, and that number jumps to 43 percent for women.

I have had a wonderful 16 days caring for my mother, Jenny Izett, in Perth while Erica is overseas visiting the Vienna Biennale and other wonderful art galleries in Europe. Her loving care has given her grandmother four extra peaceful years in her own home while giving Erica the opportunity to complete her studies - she graduated in April as a yoga teacher. Mum is now in a cradle hoist and will shortly transfer to residential care. With the assistance of a multicab we have been able to go to the movies and lunch every day, and even managed to see the live show, Grumpy Old Women.

**Pacific.** I am looking forward to visiting Vanuatu next week to attend to some business and catch up with friends. One I won't meet this time is Nancy Wells, formerly the country's Government Statistician - one of few Pacific women to ever hold such a post, who is now working with the Asian Development Bank. Based in Manila, Nancy has an advisory role covering Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam, Taipei and Uzbekistan. I will then have a couple of days with family in Sydney before I return to Kigali via Dubai on 19 June. Andrew leaves shortly for World Rowing Championships, coaching the Olympic coxless four. Ellen has also returned to international rowing competition, supported for the first time by the provision of childcare, which Andrew's children will also enjoy. All grandchildren are thriving - Emilia off to Europe with her school band and stopping over with cousin Nathan for a week in Dubai.

In the Solomon Islands, 40 people were killed and 6,000 left homeless by the earthquake and tsunami which smashed the impoverished archipelago on April 2. The island of Ranonga lifted three metres out of the sea and the shoreline was pushed out 70 metres - a permanent change to the island's geography. An underwater chasm opened up, running 500 metres parallel to the coast and the local community lost valuable fishing grounds. Houses were also been damaged and gardens destroyed by landslides. Complete recovery is still a long way away with thousands of people living in camps across the islands and every sign that they will be doing so for some time.

**Rwanda.** Throughout Rwanda in April we again mourned the victims of the genocide: Thirteen years after some 800,000 Rwandans were murdered by their compatriots in an orchestrated criminal campaign, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for "a global partnership against genocide" and pledged to strengthen UN mechanisms to ensure that such an event never happens again, upgrading the post of UN Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide to a full-time

position. The scars of the Rwandan genocide will take a long time to heal. Communities throughout the country are struggling to deal with the legacy of unthinkable brutality. Families headed by orphaned teenagers, with sibling dependants, are commonplace. It is [horrific that every day, bodies](#) are still being uncovered [as the Gacaca trials continue](#), and confessions and disclosures of burial places are made.

Gacaca is a traditional mode of grassroots justice in which the elders arbitrate in low profile disputes. The system was reestablished to help reduce a backlog of genocide cases in classical courts and as a mean of fostering unity and reconciliation in the country: 1,545 Gacaca courts countrywide are judging people implicated in the genocide. [One of my wonderful guard/gardeners has just gone through the Gacaca process. It is hard to believe that such a gentle, generous person could have been involved, but the situation was complex, with huge pressure on people to collaborate in the killings. I had always wondered why Eustace had two families from the same wife – one group of children over the age of 13 and one under the age of 4, but it seems he may have spent many years in the jungles of the Congo after 1994.](#) Rwanda released more than 9,000 genocide prisoners in March, as part of the latest wave of releases under a 2003 presidential decree. About 60,000 inmates have been freed since. The government has said the releases are to ease overcrowding and foster reconciliation.

Rwanda has accused France of hosting many genocide suspects. A military tribunal in Rwanda has found a priest, resident in France, guilty of rape and involvement in the 1994 genocide and sentenced him in absentia to life in prison. Rwanda has filed a case at the World Court accusing France of violating international law by seeking the prosecutions of Rwandan President Paul Kagame and associates. A French judge issued nine arrest warrants in November over the 1994 shooting down of a plane in which former Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana died and this is said to have triggered the planned genocide campaign. The French prevented a UN request to investigate the crash at the time, and responsibility has never been determined

Rwanda is planning to limit the number of children to be born in each family to three, which could make it the first country in Africa to restrict the number of births as a measure for economic growth. A 2002 census estimated Rwanda's population at 8.2 million people, most of whom are subsistence farmers, and it was expected to reach 9.3 million by 2007. At current fertility rates of 6 children per woman, Rwanda's population will double by 2030. Since the genocide, this tiny central African state's population has seen a very sharp rise, growing at an average of 3.3 percent per year. It is the most densely populated country on the African continent at 343 people per square kilometer. Currently, only 10 percent of Rwanda's population uses family planning measures. Many Tutsis have the goal of trying to replace their family members who died. One woman said, "We were 12 from my mother's womb. The war found us here and 10 were killed, What if my mother had given birth to only three? If they are sure all is well ahead, [security] then it is okay, but if they are not, then [family planning] is a mistake".

The global AIDS epidemic continues to grow and there is alarming evidence that some countries are seeing a resurgence in new HIV infection rates, which were previously stable or declining. However, declines in infection rates are being observed in some countries such as Rwanda, as well as positive trends in young people's sexual behaviours. In Rwanda the HIV prevalence rate is 4 percent in rural areas and 11 percent in urban. Three percent of Rwandans aged between 19 and 49 are HIV infected. As in most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Rwandese women continue to be more likely than men to be infected with HIV and they are also more likely to be the ones caring for people infected with HIV. The most recent data shows that in the age group of 15-24 there are eight times as many girls as boys contracting HIV in SSA. The biological vulnerability of women to HIV infection is made worse by poverty which forces young women and girls into early marriages and to engage in transactional sex (sex in exchange for money, food or services). In Rwanda as in other regional countries, positive trends in young people's sexual behaviours over the last decade were reported - increased use of condoms, delay of sexual debut, and fewer sexual partners - leading to declines in HIV prevalence among young people between 2000 and 2005.

**Africa.** Another genocidal famine is taking place in Darfur Sudan where the four-year conflict between rebels and pro-government Arab militia has seen some 300 000 persons killed, starved or raped and at least 2.4 million displaced. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has described Sudan's decision to allow 3,000 UN troops into Darfur as "a very positive sign." The UN contingent will provide support for 7,000 struggling African Union troops there. Sudan's apparent change of heart comes after months of international pressure to accept UN peacekeepers. But Khartoum is yet to agree to the deployment of a much-larger AU force of 20,000 troops proposed by the UN. Camps for internally displaced persons in Sudan's Darfur are almost at full capacity due to a continuing influx of people fleeing violence, with tens of thousands being uprooted every month. At a personal level, two Sudanese women were sentenced to death by stoning for adultery after a trial in which they had no lawyer and which used Arabic, not their first language.

I attended the South African Association of Women Graduates annual meeting and conference in Cape Town in March, presenting a paper on *Drop-Outs at School and Tertiary Level – What is happening to our girls?* President Thabo Mbeki used Freedom Day to call on South Africans to support policies aimed at bringing black people into the mainstream economy. He said the majority of South Africans were still excluded and marginalized from the ownership, management and control of the economy. Millions of people, mainly blacks, were still living in abject poverty. South Africa also has a major problem with HIV still spreading rapidly. Up to 40 percent of women aged between 25 and 29 are reported to be HIV positive, and among youths aged between 15 and 24, women accounted for 90 percent of all recent infections. 1500 South Africans are infected by HIV every day, the incidence among women much more than in men of the same age group. One in three deaths of people with HIV/AIDS is caused by tuberculosis. There have been 21 new HIV drugs for every one new TB drug since 1986; the test for TB is 100 years old, and the vaccine being used today is the same as it was 80 years ago.

In April I attended the SNV consultation on HIV/AIDS in Nairobi Kenya to determine our East and Southern African regional policy. I also had another visit to Burundi to the Rotary District Conference where I met with women from the Burundi Association of University Women.

**Women.** Worldwide, the gender gap persists in all countries and the general trend is either very slow progress or no progress at all towards equality between women and men. The 2007 Gender Equity Index has been published. It was developed by Social Watch to rank countries from 0 to 100 according to the social indicators of economic activity, empowerment and education using internationally available and comparable data. Rwanda ranks in the third highest spot on the 2007 GEI list with a score of 84, after Sweden (89) and Finland (also 84) and followed by Norway (83). This impressive performance has been achieved through the application of affirmative action policies, such as legislation to ensure minimum quotas for women's political participation and labour market equity. The United States has a score of 74, but it has regressed 7 percent in relation to 2004 and is one of the ten countries that have experienced the worst regression in recent years. The GEI demonstrates that it is not necessary to achieve high levels of economic growth or industrialization to implement effective policies to promote greater equity. Obviously, the modification of inequitable situations depends fundamentally on the transformation of cultural patterns and power distribution.

The modest Guideline of the 1995 Beijing World Conference for Women of at least 30 percent female representation by 2000 was offered by the largest gathering of informed women ever on the planet, many of whom felt even then that the minimum should have been closer to women's 50 percent presence on Earth; The minimums have not been met in too many places, are overdue and appear recklessly delayed. World leaders frequently warn that each day without a balance of gender in decision making, impacts are felt on economics that do not include women and their social, healthcare, family, peace and environment priorities. The Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific entitled *Surging Ahead in Uncertain Times*, has a special chapter that addressed the economic cost of gender discrimination. In the report UNESCAP estimates financial losses of USD 42-47 billion due to restrictions on women's access to employment opportunities, and a further USD 16-30 billion a year because of gender gaps in education in the region.

In advances around the world, the new government in Finland has 12 women out of 20 cabinet ministers, i.e. 60 per cent women, which is a new European record. The new Prime Minister of France has appointed seven women to his 15 person Cabinet. Geneva became the first Swiss city where women are a majority in parliament, now occupying 45 of the 80 seats. Of the seven parties in the city parliament, five are now represented by a majority of women

Josette Sheeran, was appointed the new executive director of the UN World Food Program. In an address to staff at Rome headquarters upon officially taking up her duties in April she promised to the more than 850 million men, women and children who know what it is like go to bed hungry that "you will never be forgotten and I will do everything I can, not just to bring you food, but hope for a better future." She called for a renewed commitment to the one billion hungry men, women and children throughout the world, highlighting that every year, 4 million more become malnourished.

A physician by training, Chile's president, Ms. Bachelet, the only South American woman to have won elections without riding the coattails of a powerful husband, seeks to improve women's standing in society in a permanent way. She embraced gender issues from the start of her administration and after a year in office can point to a number of gains:-- A law she called "just and beautiful" gave women the right to breast-feed at work.-- Penalties were stiffened for men who fail to pay alimony.-- Hundreds of nurseries have been established nationwide, as well as domestic violence shelters for women and children.-- Equal numbers of women and men now hold top administration jobs, including in her Cabinet.-- Women were for the first time admitted at the naval academy.-- Girls as young as 14 can get free morning-after contraceptive pills. Other targets are Chile's law on domestic violence, more jobs for women and a bill to make political parties reserve 30 per cent of their slate of candidates in congressional and municipal elections for women.

Life for me continues to be full of challenges. In April I was keynote speaker for the International Conference on Women Sports for Gender Equity and Social Change, organised by the Association of Kigali Women Footballers. I have recently contributed as a joint author with other members of the International Federation of University Women to a Unesco paper on Civil Society Partnerships and Development Policies: Emerging Trends. As Convener of the IFUW projects committee I have been reviewing over 30 development project proposals from associations around the world. In August I will be attending the IFUW triennial conference in Manchester, UK. The Rwanda Association of University Women celebrated its launch with nearly 250 members. I love my SNV work of capacity building. We have created a gender Dgroup for the region.

Blessings of joy and peace.



Shirley (with Jenny)

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