

Dear friends

10 December 2007

This Rwanda 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 wish 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, to avoid being taken off the list.

### Work Challenges



I am taking a breath to send you season's greetings and one of William Blake's wonderful nativity scenes, after another two weeks of travel and training. I attended my first International Federation of University Women Board meeting in Geneva as Vice President, then spent a week at the Naivasha Lake Resort in Kenya, on an SNV East and Southern African workshop to clarify SNV's new cross-cutting principle, "governance for empowerment", which embraces gender, HIV/Aids, social inclusion and environmental sustainability, together with training on the Local Governance Barometer, a new tool we plan to use to measure good governance. Returning to Rwanda I trained on our new SNV AAA policy (Analysis, Action, Assessment) and then in a UNDP/SNV workshop on the UN Devinfo data system at Musanze, some two hours from Kigali. My contract is to be renewed for another year and I become Senior Adviser Education. I will retain my involvement in gender and in governance, as a member of the regional steering committee and regional task force on good governance.

### Africa

Many African economies appear to have turned the corner and moved to a path of faster and steadier economic growth, according to the World Bank's Africa Development Indicators 2007 report. Country performances in 1995-2005 reverse the collapses in 1975-85 and the stagnations in 1985-95, and for the first time in three decades, they are growing in tandem with the rest of the world. Average growth in the Sub-Saharan economies was 5.4 percent in 2005 and 2006, and the consensus projections are that growth will remain strong. Leading the way are the oil and mineral exporters, thanks to high prices. But 18 non-mineral economies, with 36 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's people, have also been doing well. The report looked at more than 1,000 indicators covering economic, human and private-sector development, governance, the environment and aid. It concludes that growth in many African countries appears to be fast and steady enough to put a dent on the region's high poverty rate and to attract global investment.

### Rwanda

Rwanda continues to gain recognition for progress, going up 18 places in the Ibrahim index of African Governance, which ranks sub-Sahara African countries' governance performance. The country ranked sixth in the world for tree planting - the smallest of the top countries, which were Ethiopia, Mexico, Turkey, Kenya and Cuba - planting 50 million trees from January to October. Rwanda's life expectancy rose from 39 to 53 in the last decade— the highest growth rate in Africa. The country is also way ahead in prioritizing expenditures in the agricultural sector, which contributes some 36 percent to total production (GDP) and employs 80 percent of the workforce.

Rwanda is also becoming a key site for international and intercontinental conferences. Ten African heads of state, 53 ICT ministers and 19 IT companies flew into Kigali for the recent Connect Africa Summit. Rwanda imagines that one day it will be the IT hub for the resource-rich nations of Eastern and Central Africa. The fact that Rwanda is closing in on this goal without having the massive oil wealth of Angola or Sudan, the diamonds of Congo or South Africa, or even the copper of nearby Zambia is a testimony to the power of imagination. In 2000, the government decided to transform the country from agricultural subsistence to a knowledge-based economy by 2020, and with two fiber-optic rings around Kigali, and cable being laid across the country, Rwanda is well on its way to being wired. Sometime in the next two years, nearly every

school in Rwanda – from distant mountain villages to swelling urban areas – will be hooked up to the Internet. President Paul Kagame has won the African Lifetime Achievers Award from ForgeAhead and Rwanda's Treatment and Research Aids Centre was awarded two trophies for its use of ICT in health services. TRACnet is a system that uses cellphones, text messages and a SQL Server database to report new infections and ARV use. Rwanda is also one of the leading countries moving to male circumcision in the fight against Aids.

Countries like Rwanda, which rank among the world's least developed countries (LDCs), don't easily become high-tech hubs. 57 percent of Rwandans still live below the poverty line, defined by the UN as an income of less than a dollar a day. Only 5 percent of Rwandans of the current total population of close to 10million use electricity. According to a 2005 study by the Australian National University, LDCs make up 10 percent of the world's population and represent only 0.13 percent of the world's Internet users. Yet, there are hopeful signs. Nearly 74 percent of Rwanda's adults can read and write. This fact, combined with Rwanda's dense population – almost all of whom speak the same language, Kinyarwanda – make the country a much more promising place for establishing an Internet hub than Rwanda's resource-rich, ethnically diverse, and less-educated neighbors. One observer has said: "This country is very hierarchical, and whatever the government decides to do, it will do, and society will follow in a very disciplined way. That culture can be used to do very bad things, like the genocide, or can be used to make the society better."

Following on the Rwandan practice of senior public servants signing performance contracts with the President, and local government personnel with their mayors, residents are now signing family performance contracts at get-together ceremonies witnessed by local leaders and hundreds of residents. High on the list of family priorities are poverty reduction, access to information, and combating child labour. Others include family planning, enrolling children in school, and fostering a reading culture among children and adults in their families. Individuals and families together swear in front of district officials to help uphold the law and promote policies that are bringing Rwandans more and more prosperity,

### **Bangladesh and climate change**

The cyclone Sidr has caused horrific devastation and loss of life in the south-western coastal districts of Bangladesh. The death toll continues to rise – now said to be 3,500 - as more and more bodies are found. Distraught people are recounting how one child slipped away while they were trying to save another, or how they watched their mother or father being swept away. Entire villages have been destroyed, not a tree, not a house standing. The army and aid workers are still struggling to reopen roads to areas where most of the homes - fragile structures made of bamboo or tin - were wiped out by the storm. In many places, the dead were quickly buried in mass graves. Millions of people are living out in the open and relief is slow coming.

A benchmark new UN report issues another stark warning on climate change, which UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon says is already more frightening than any science fiction movie. UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change latest report states the evidence is now unequivocal – there is a 90 per cent chance that climate change is caused by human activity and may bring abrupt and irreversible effects. It warns that deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions are needed quickly to avert more heat waves, melting glaciers and rising sea levels. With more than six billion humans, Earth's population is now so big that the amount of resources needed to sustain it already exceeds what is available and global population is expected to peak at between eight and 9.7 billion by 2050. The report says: "The systematic destruction of the Earth's natural and nature-based resources has reached a point where the economic viability of economies is being challenged - and where the bill we hand on to our children may prove impossible to pay." Most Australians are delighted that the first act of our new government was to ratify Kyoto.

### **Women**

As one of Australia's journalists has pointed out, as a result of the last national elections, the country finally has a group of governing female MPs who reflect the status of women and the diversity of women's lives in contemporary Australia: women who are the daughters of migrants,

women who are single and/or childless, openly gay, unmarried with children, married with children, but who haven't taken the surname of their husbands, and others who have. Our first couple will be known as the Prime Minister and Ms Rein. It is significant and noteworthy that half the women new Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has given high-profile cabinet and portfolio responsibilities to are childless and/or unmarried – including the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. It is a great moment for generational change and validates the often difficult choices so many women have made to pursue their careers. Gillard is the 46-year-old daughter of working-class Welsh migrants, who came to Australia in 1966 when she was five. She'll juggle the massive portfolios of education, employment, workplace relations and social inclusion, and was acting Prime Minister for the first time when Rudd was in Bali for climate change talks. There are many other great stories in Labor's new team of leading women, including Maxine McKew, who – after defeating former PM Howard in Bennelong – becomes the parliamentary secretary to PM Rudd.

These are exciting and defining times in Australian political life, in our nation's history and for Australian women. We are finally at the table of power in Australia and it's been a long time coming. Australian women first voted in a federal election on 16 December 1903, and now, almost 104 years later, four of 20 cabinet ministers, three of 10 outer ministry members and three of 12 Parliamentary secretaries are women. While most are still predominantly in the caring ministries, Gillard and Wong are in portfolios that break the gender stereotype. Although there are still two seats too close to call, the results represent a 40 percent increase (from 20 to potentially 28) bringing the total percentage of women in the Labor Caucus to 34 percent (42 within a potential 122 member Caucus) - an increase from its prior 28 percent (32% in the House of Representatives and 41 percent in the Senate).

Other historic milestones for politics in Australia are the appointment of the first Aboriginal woman to become Deputy Chief Minister in the Northern Territory - Marion Scrymgour, and of Anna Bligh, who is Queensland's first woman Premier and only the sixth woman to lead a state or territory in Australia. This landmark achievement comes 78 years after the first woman was elected to the Queensland Parliament, and 21 years after the first woman Cabinet Minister was appointed. With the election of Grace Grace to the state seat of Brisbane, formerly held by Peter Beattie, the Queensland Labor Government now has the highest proportion of women MPs in the country (42.4%). Queensland is leading the way on women's representation. The 25 Labor women in Premier Bligh's government are equal to the total number of Coalition Members of the Opposition.

And in South America, the land of machismo, where leaders were long supposed to conform to the standard of the strong-armed military man in epaulettes, a rising wave of leaders is working on a new 21st-century cliché: La Presidenta. The movement started at the southern tip, where Chile elected Michelle Bachelet president last year. Argentina followed in October, choosing first lady Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as its first elected female president. Developments in Paraguay and Brazil have South Americans confronting a prospect that just a few years ago would have seemed utterly impossible: a continent where the majority of the population is led by women. When people began demanding strongly a change in elites, women suddenly became an option. It might be just what South America needs to confront lingering social ills such as poverty and income inequality. In terms of political empowerment for women, Argentina has jumped to 23rd on the list, ahead of the United States, where American voters are considering the possibility of a female front-runner in Hillary Rodham Clinton (The first ladies of Rwanda and Zambia joined Hillary at Saddleback Valley Community Church in Southern California on 28 November for three days to mobilize local churches around the world to help prevent HIV/AIDS and care for its victims). Many observers credit the progress to a law passed in 1991 in Argentina aimed at increasing female representation in the National Congress. The number of women in Argentina's legislature more than quadrupled immediately after the law was enacted, and 11 other Latin American countries passed similar laws within the next decade.

Sierra Leone's 50/50 Group has just won the 2007 Madeleine Albright award for its exemplary work in encouraging large numbers of women to seek elected office for the democratic party of their choice. Established in 2005, the Award builds on the Win with Women Global Initiative, promoting strategies to increase women's political leadership worldwide. Having become a household name through its prominent electoral activities, the 50/50 Group capitalizes on the period between elections to further its mission, especially the long-term goal of changing traditional prejudices and stereotypes that have marginalized women in the past. Between elections, the Group promotes its objectives through its branches around the country. A year-around radio talk show educates the general public on leadership, women's issues and local government, and seeks to change perceptions of women in politics through regular interviews with successful women. These efforts have helped build a network of talented women ready to assume leadership roles in politics and civic life.

Other advances for women include the appointment of Luamanuvao Winnie Laban, New Zealand's first female Pacific Island cabinet minister. The Solomon Islands government has appointed its first woman, Ruth Liloqula, who has impressive academic and professional achievements in agriculture and administration, as Secretary to Cabinet, the top public service post, and Emma Garo Ma'aramo as the first qualified female lawyer to join the bench as Principal Magistrate. In other countries, Antigua and Barbuda's Governor General, Yucatán's Governor, Bosnia and Herzegovina's President, the Foreign ministers of Andorra, Cyprus, East Timor; and Nepal, and Japan's Minister of Defense are recent appointments for women. Former PM Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan to end eight years of self-exile and lead her party into national elections, despite suicide attacks. Bhutto remains one of the most recognizable politicians in the world, having been prime minister twice and the first female leader of a Muslim nation.

Sahar Issa, was among six Iraqi female reporters who received the International Women's Media Foundation courage award. She said Iraqi journalists must lead double lives, not telling friends or relatives what they do because of the dangers, and knowing that "every interview we conduct may be our last." A Mexican reporter who faced death threats for her reporting on pedophiles, and an Ethiopian journalist who was charged with treason, also received awards for courage. Elizabeth Mataka executive director of the Zambia National AIDS Network, is now UN special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa.

### **16 days action on violence against women**

UNIFEM's Goodwill Ambassador, Australian Nicole Kidman, announced its 16 days VAW program, saying: "Sexual violence is a weapon of war, an instrument of terror that hurts and punishes women and men of the other side, fractures communities and forces women to flee their homes. Silence and shame shroud the survivors of rape or other forms of sexual violence. Many become infected with HIV" The inability of women and girls to negotiate safer sex and refuse unwanted sex is linked to the high prevalence of HIV and AIDS, as is the violence too many women and girls experience in conflict situations. Violence against women during or after armed conflict has been reported in every international or non-international war zone.

This week we had the horrific report of an 11 month old baby dying after being raped in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rwandan women had firsthand experience of rape as a weapon of war during the genocide, and thousands still live with the scars and the trauma. The same thing is happening in DRC and Darfur, the sheer numbers and wholesale brutality is appalling. Sexual violence is rampant and committed by all factions involved in the fighting, non-state armed groups, the armed forces, the police and increasingly also by civilians, in a culture of impunity. Women experience a continuum of violence, which manifests itself in various forms in their homes and communities. VAW seems to be perceived by large sectors of society to be normal. In North Kivu alone, there are over 300 cases of rape reported each month; the unofficial figure could be much higher. There have been reports of young girls being coerced into sex for jobs and an alarming rate of teenage pregnancies in the refugee camps. There has been a call for peacekeepers, troops and police to be trained on gender issues before and during their field deployment to strengthen their ability to prevent the atrocities committed against women.

In Papua New Guinea, there is a general, pervasive feeling of dismay and helplessness about the increasing levels of violence in all sectors of society, particularly violence within the family which should be a safe haven for all people - women, children and men. Dame Carol Kidu, the sole female MP in Papua New Guinea, has at last had success in getting a debate in Parliament on VAW with the support of firm political action from women. The Prime Minister has now spoken out against violence and the Police Commissioner has declared war on men who abuse women. His comments follow an increase in the reported cases of VAW in the PNG highlands, where several women have been killed, tortured and mutilated. The PC suspended a senior police officer for beating his wife and has called on all police men and women to investigate domestic violence. Meanwhile a regional conference on CEDAW in Vanuatu has renewed calls for legislation against domestic violence – now nearly 20 years in gestation.

The end of the year is a good time to pause, reflect on what has passed, appreciate all that has been provided, plan for what is to come, recommit to the journey ahead, and renew our support to each other, striving to be more caring, better informed members of society in tune with the other creatures sharing this earth with us. Peace and strength to you.

Shirley

