

MARCH 2008

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY EXHIBITION

As part of the commemorative activities preceding the International Women's Day (IWD) which falls on 8th March every year, the organising committee of the celebrations in Zambia, chaired by the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development, held a Financial Institutions Exhibitions as a way of making financial institutions stakeholders in the promotion of gender equality.

The theme for 2008 commemoration was '*Financing for gender equality in Zambia*'. The Bank of Zambia was given the task of coordinating the event, which saw all the major commercial banks in the country coming on board to participate.

The ILO was part of the IWD celebrations through its Women's Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality (WEDGE) Programme. One of the objectives of the WEDGE Programme is to facilitate access to finance for women entrepreneurs, hence its participation in the Financial Institutions' exhibition. The programme exhibited together with other United Nations agencies under the one UN stand.

Speaking during the official opening of the event held at the Mulungushi International Conference Center, Gender and Women in Development Minister Patricia Mulasikwanda said there is more to be done in the fight for gender equality.

"Gender imbalances in favour of men still exist. There is need to facilitate access to finance for women in order to alleviate poverty", she said.

Mrs Mulasikwanda further said that the promotion of gender equality is an important catalyst for meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

Speaking during the same event, ILO Country Director, Gerry Finnegan, on the behalf of the UN team in Zambia, said there can be no equality without women and men having equal opportunity- "equality and equity must go hand in hand". Mr Finnegan further emphasised the need to engage men in the promotion of gender equality.

Meanwhile, Bank of Zambia Governor, Caleb Fundanga, said the attainment of 30% women representation was not impossible. He added that there is need for the women themselves to step up their interest and level of business activity.

"The government has made commendable strides in trying to promote gender equality; what is needed is for the women to step up and rise to the positions they desire", he said.

Commenting on women's accessibility to finance, Dr Fundanga said he recognised that accessibility was unfortunately very low. He added that one of the major inhibiting factors has been the issue of collateral, which many women fail to meet. Dr Fundanga called on the financial institutions to revisit the matter in order to ensure increased access to financial services by women.

The event, which lasted two days (5-6 March), saw a large number of women and men turning up to find out more on what services the financial institutions had to

offer. The UN contingent, which included the ILO, UNAIDS among others, gave out books and other information literature on the activities undertaken by various agencies in promoting gender equality.