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THE NATIONAL COUNCIL *for* RESEARCH *on* WOMEN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Corporate and Civil Society Leaders Come Together at UN on Women's Issues

New York (March 13, 2008) – The National Council for Research on Women held a special event on March 6th that brought together corporate and civil society leaders to discuss transformative leadership and how to build collaborative partnerships.

In a packed conference room near UN headquarters, the event drew dozens of representatives from non-governmental organizations as well as from the business community – two sectors often viewed as adversaries. Panelists included leaders from JP Morgan Chase, the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), Citi Foundation, and Demos. The meeting focused on prospects for and challenges to cross-sectoral collaboration on some of today's most critical issues, particularly climate change and the potential growth of the microfinance sector.

“More and more businesses are seeking ways to align policies with good social practices,” said NCRW President Linda Basch. “Such principled leadership is a model of successful leadership for the 21st century.”

A recurring theme of the afternoon program was “Corporate Social Responsibility [CSR].” As a rising standard for the private sector, CSR focuses on the role of companies as global citizens responsible not only to shareholders and the ‘bottom line,’ but also to stakeholders and society, in general.

“We are in the midst of a paradigm shift – corporations can and must become good global citizens. Corporate social responsibility is no longer seen as a nice thing to do only if there is extra time or money, but is increasingly being viewed as both a business and social imperative,” Basch continued.

A large part of the discussion focused on the role of the private sector in addressing climate change and environmental protection.

“JP Morgan Chase is taking a role in resolving environmental issues because our employees expect us to,” said Amy Davidsen, Director of Environmental Affairs at JPMC. “There is an economic reason to act today. It has been determined that on the issue of climate change, the impacts will cost more than today's mitigation.”

Despite recent initiatives such as investment in cleaner technologies and internal carbon footprint reduction, there was passionate debate over the substantial challenges to collaboration across private and non-profit sectors. Some obstacles cited included high

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levels of mistrust on all sides, as well as too little investment by both NGOs and the private sector in developing such partnerships.

“Collaboration is not just about being open and listening, but also about compromise. It is important to realize that both sides don’t have to agree on all twenty issues but can perhaps find commonality on two and work together to find a solution,” said June Zeitlin, Executive Director of WEDO.

The discussion revealed that most of the problems do not stem from a lack of will, but from a lack of communication. Panelists indicated that vital dialogue was not taking place because private and non-profit sector representatives are rarely even in the same room.

“Often, business people won’t attend meetings with advocates for fear that they will have a finger pointed at them,” explained Shari Cohen, Senior Fellow at Demos.

Several audience members raised concerns about a range of topics including diversity in both corporate and civil society leadership, financial education for women, and the role of the media in combating negative representations.

“Both mentorship and education are extremely important,” said Leslie Meek-Wohl, Senior Program Officer at Citi Foundation. “For example, Citi’s Financial Education initiative is targeted to poor women, providing them with financial literacy and negotiation skills.”

The event coincided with the 52nd Annual Meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, highlighting both the relevance and significance of the day’s discussion.

For more information visit our website: www.ncrw.org or contact: Vivienne Heston-Demirel, tel: (212) 785-7335 x201; vheston-demirel@ncrw.org