

UNIFEM Executive Director Noeleen Heyzer

Noeleen Heyzer is the first executive director from the South to head the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the leading operational agency within the United Nations to promote women's empowerment and gender equality. Since joining UNIFEM, Dr Heyzer has worked on strengthening women's economic security and rights; promoting women's leadership in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and reconstruction; ending violence against women; and combating HIV/AIDS from a gender perspective. She also played a critical role in the UN Security Council's adoption of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and in ensuring that it is implemented in order to make a difference to women's lives on the ground.



Through her leadership, UNIFEM has assisted countries to formulate and implement legislation and policies to realize women's security and rights. This has led, for example, to changes in inheritance laws for women, better working conditions for migrant workers, the inclusion of women as full citizens in the constitution of Afghanistan and as full participants in several peace negotiations and electoral processes. UNIFEM has also quadrupled its resources, and successfully advocated to put issues affecting women high on the agenda of the UN system.

Before joining UNIFEM, Dr Heyzer was a policy adviser to several Asian governments on gender issues, playing a key role in the formulation of national development policies, strategies and programmes from a gender perspective. She has done extensive work at the community level with women migrant workers, women in the informal sector and in plantations, young women in prostitution and female workers in free trade zones.

Dr Heyzer has been a founding member of numerous regional and international women's networks and has published extensively on gender and development issues, especially economic globalization, international migration and trafficking, gender and trade, and women, peace and security.

Born in Singapore, she received a B.A. and an M.A. from the University of Singapore and a doctorate in social sciences from Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. She has received several awards for leadership including the UNA–Harvard Leadership Award, the Woman of Distinction Award from the UN–NGO Committee on the Status of Women, NCRW "Women Who Make a Difference" Award in 2005, and the Dag Hammarskjöld medal in 2004 given to "a person who has promoted, in action and spirit, the values that inspired Dag Hammarskjöld as Secretary-General of the United Nations and generally in his life: compassion, humanism and commitment to international solidarity and cooperation."