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**Equality is a matter of human rights**

New York, 11 Mar (IPS/Roger Hamilton-Martin) -- Gender equality in political, economic and social arenas is a matter of human rights, said Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury on 9 March to civil society organisations, ambassadors and activists in New York.

Speaking at the Soka Gakkai International's New York headquarters, the former Bangladesh Ambassador to the United Nations highlighted the ongoing 59th meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, which runs from March 9 to 20 at the UN in New York.

"2015 is an extraordinary year for women and humanity," Chowdhury noted, pointing to the UN's post-2015 development goals, which will be finalised later this year, as an opportunity for furthering gender equality.

Chowdhury said that despite some progress, he was disappointed with efforts to implement key measures with regard to including women in political processes, especially Security Council Resolution 1325.

The Resolution, adopted in October 2000, stresses the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

It calls on countries to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence in conflict.

"During this biggest ever gathering, a number of civil society are focusing on 15th anniversary of 1325," said Chowdhury.

A global study has been commissioned by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to review 15 years of implementation of 1325, before October of this year.

"National action plans are the engines that would speed up the implementation of 1325," urged Chowdhury.

Only 47 member states have managed to prepare national action plans since the Resolution was adopted.

Chowdhury reflected that while national governments must do more to improve gender equality in political participation and peacemaking, the UN must also hold itself to a higher standard.

"The UN's own record isn't something that we can be proud of," he said.

Since the world body was established in 1945, not one of its secretary-generals has been a woman - a fact that may change when Ban Ki-Moon's term finishes in December 2016.

Chowdhury was keen to emphasise that issues of gender equality are not simply important for women, saying "equality between women and men is a matter of human rights, and a matter for peace and social justice ... Today's slogan should be ‘women and men together, we have the power to empower.'"