

## Noeleen Heyzer Oral History Content Summary

### Track 1 [53:23] [session one]

Noeleen Heyzer [NH] Born Singapore immediately after WWII. Describes as difficult time, impact of war and colonial powers, Singapore as destination for migrant workers from India, Armenia, bonded workers from China. Story about maternal grandmother, a *Mui Tsai* bonded girl with four children, NH's mother placed in orphanage, uncle in Raffles Lighthouse, refuge from execution. Describes father's arrival from Calcutta, India, links with Dutch burghers, British Army. Discusses wartime jobs as unrelated to professional certification, use of Ayurvedic medicine and practical measures, and impact of post-war professionalization, families falling into deep poverty with skills no longer acknowledged. [05:02] Describes growing up in slum community of migrants, mother's long work hours, NH not attending school until age eight, environment of radicalism and debate in fight against colonialism. Discusses Western understanding of oppression of women as embedded in family, NH distinguishing Eastern countries and social system impacted by colonialism and abuse of labor, sense of outrage developed. Describes characteristics of women in own environment, sisterhoods established before term Feminism. Describes *Mui Tsai* construction workers and 'White and Black' costumed caregivers, setting own standards. Acknowledges own learning through life experience. [10:00] Describes circumstances after mother's death when NH aged six, grandmother's conversion to Christianity, enabling NH first attendance of school aged eight. Mentions Cambridge International Examinations. Describes women in family and exposure to different class and perspectives in elitist school, NH questioning power. Reflects on concept of family and sisterhoods unrelated by blood. [15:00] Describes further education in Science and Mathematics, then changing to Sociology and teaching class while at Singapore University (now National University of Singapore). Describes political climate of the Cold War period, contestation throughout Southeast Asia, communism versus Western capitalism, search for the Third Way and non-aligned movements. Mentions Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, China. Describes own response and political sensitivity of environment, eventual belief in democracy for individual freedom, becoming a democratic socialist. Mentions first protest, against apartheid. [19:40] Describes becoming International Secretary of Democratic Socialist Club, travelling to several Scandinavian countries to observe model and how functioned, aged 20. Describes meeting Olof Palme, Karl Gunnar Myrdal, Ivan Illich, looking at concept of education and schooling as technical, application and observation coming from society. Describes male environment, all male political leadership, NH feeling equal. Mentions Socialist International. Describes meeting husband in Salzburg, Austria. Describes political and philosophical preoccupations at the time, meeting Argentinians from Juan Perón's Party, Israelis, Indians from labour movement. Discusses investment in young as critical, referring to own travels in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Austria, Germany, as investment inspiring NH as a leader. [25:09] Describes receiving three volume 'Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations' from Gunnar Myrdal, winner of The Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, 1974. Describes being raised Catholic with Chinese religion characterised by spirit mediums, celebrating the Month of the Ghosts, with mosques, Hindu temples and Chinese temples in close proximity, acknowledging one another's freedom of expression of spirituality. Describes own spiritual belief and support throughout life. [28:16] Story about birth of children after several miscarriages. Mentions scholarship

to Cambridge University, United Kingdom (UK), journey by boat, German measles, Mill Road Hospital in Cambridge, Cambridge Maternity Hospital, Margaret Thatcher. Describes background to start of career, husband as strong political character, youngest Member of Parliament in Malaysia at time, visiting migrant Malaysian workers while visiting NH in Singapore. [35:00] Describes working environment, incidence of shipyard fires. Describes encounter with women brought in as factory workers as part of international production chain. NH joining forces, becoming textile worker. Exposure to realities of said industrialization based on Factory Asia, NH studying migrant garment workers on production chain, considering concepts of independence and political struggle, World Employment Programme of The International Labour Organization's interest in findings, NH's work published by Lourdes Benería and Zubaida Ahmad. Leading to work at Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK. Mentions Kate Young, Richard Jolly, Thatcher Government. Background to position at The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Bangkok, Thailand, 1982. [41:03] Describes moving of organization after Iranian Revolution, 1979. Mentions The United Nations World Conference on International Women's Year, Mexico City, Mexico, 1975. Describes formation of Asia Pacific Center for Women and Development (APCWD) and Soedjatmoko's vision, reflecting on own experience of 'amazing ten years', only woman working well among men who broke barriers. Reflects on work achieved at ESCAP in difficult working environment. [45:10] Focus on migration particularly issues around trafficking, encompassing child prostitution and sex trade, NH viewing as political issue as well as developmental, pushing to intergovernmental discussion. Mentions Vietnam War. Describes opening discussion on culture and ideology, and definitions in development, intergovernmental paper regional preparatory material for The United Nations Third Conference on Women, Nairobi, Kenya, 1985 (Nairobi). Mentions Iranian Government. Describes freedom of position at APCWD, becoming one of richest programmes in organisation under NH. Describes personal strength, global solidarity and support arising from Nairobi conference experience. Describes immediately planning towards The United Nations Fourth World Conference On Women, Beijing, China, 1995, mobilising women lawyers in region, and women in media network, working with Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). Describes enormous groundwork achieved in ten-year period, building frameworks for future government accountability, developing analysis to change policy and institutions, giving voice and agency to people on ground. Describes wider involvement of women in all UN conferences, changing consciousness. Mentions Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Describes subsequent analysis of programme by Andrew Joseph, The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), recognising it as 'beacon'. [52: 04] Describes funding structure, mentioning The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and donors from Sweden, The Netherlands, Australia. Describes vision of creating networks that would survive regardless of government support.

## **Track 2 [19:40] [session one cont'd]**

Background to position as Executive Director of UNIFEM. Describes vulnerable state of organisation on joining, NH viewing as crisis of demand, focusing on Beijing conference as chance to demonstrate, producing, 'A Commitment to the World's Women: Perspectives on Development for Beijing and Beyond.' Describes organising

event at Summer Palace, Beijing, during conference. [06:44] Approach by The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee. Mentions The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Describes collaboration with CEDAW structured as business plan. Mentions Muhammad Yunus, Grameen Bank. Discusses redefining role of UNIFEM and impacting UN system to make accountable to change agenda. Describes significance of women's economic security and rights, and development of Women's Empowerment Principles. Mentions Home Net, Selfless Efforts for Welfare of All (SEWA), Global Compact. [10: 41] Describes work on contracts for migrant workers, Convention on Domestic Workers incorporated in International Labour Organization (ILO). Discusses significance of this work in terms of social labelling, ethical markets. Describes work on ending violence against women, establishing trust fund immediately after Beijing conference. Mentions Japanese donors, regional campaign, 'A Life Free of Violence is Our Right'. Describes pilot schemes launched in communities as examples for governments to implement. Discusses budgeting process, gender budgeting, mission to show that work on women beyond social sector, as investment linking to economics. Discusses first UN acknowledgement of Violence Against Women in 1993, at The United Nations World Conference on Human Rights, Cairo, Egypt. Mentions The World Bank's role in enabling first electronic conversations to showcase best laws, best policies, best experiences, on different types of violence. Mentions Princess Basma bint Talal of Jordan, honour killing, female genital mutilation, Senegal, Kenya. [15:47] Describes shift in women's role at UN General Assembly, 1999. Mentions first global video conference, Kofi Annan, President of the World Bank, Nelson Mandela. Describes UNIFEM exhibition 'Wall of Shame' and 'Wall of Hope'. Discusses climate of strong resistance in UN system at time against methodology now entrenched. Mentions work on leadership and governance and exploring meaning of feminist leadership and transformational leadership.

### **Track 3 [32:56] [session one continued]**

Discusses focus at UNIFEM on development, difficulty when countries in conflict. Mentions Rwanda, Liberia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, East Timor. Describes identifying overlap between Development area and Conflict, Peace and security area of UN in practice compartmentalized, NH approach of UN Security Council to include women's security and subsequent work, beginning with consultancy with Namibian Government. Detail of work and NH's first impressions, leading to landmark Resolution 1325. Mentions Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, Kofi Annan, Arria-Formula. [06:00] Gives detail of four pillars of Resolution 1325 and impact. Mentions Navi Pillay, The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), The International Criminal Court (ICC). Discusses Afghanistan post 9/11. Attendance of International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan in Tokyo, Japan, 2002, as member of Kofi Annan's delegation. Detail of NH's role and approach to get women involved in discussions. Mentions Sadako Ogata, Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), United Nations, Guatemala, Colombia, Liberia, Rwanda. [10:00] Work in Afghanistan, organising International Women's Day in Taliban-destroyed cinema in Kabul. Mentions Sima Samar, Hamid Karzai, Grand Assembly, Afghanistan. Story about Lakhdar Brahimi's changed stance. Describes collaboration with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Elisabeth Rehn, resulting in publication of 'Women, War and

Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building'. Anecdote about Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Describes involvement with Liberia, working with Vabah Gayflor, organising women's conference. Describes enabling women's votes by establishing ballot boxes in market place. [15:52] Discusses significance of work in Rwanda, NH addressing assembly, encouraging women's political participation. Observes changes in Rwandan women's land rights and education rights, healthcare. Account of visiting Tutsi and Hutu community of women living with HIV/AIDS, leading to peace basket initiative with Willa Shalit on return to New York, United States of America (USA), collaboration with Macy's, Inc. and Bloomingdales, Nicole Kidman to become Rwanda Path To Peace programme. Describes impact in Rwanda, revitalising economy with broader implications. [22:24] Discusses UNIFEM's transformation to UN Women. Mentions Women Development Corporation Minister appointed in The Netherlands, UNDP, The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), The United Nations World Food Program (WFP), UN Development Group, Margaret C. Snyder, Sharon Capeling-Alakija, The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW), Roxanna Carrillo, Joanne Sandler, The United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), The Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), United Nations Group of 77 (G77), ESCAP, Mexico Conference.