

**Closing remarks by Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive
Director of UN Women, Sima Bahous, at the First Regular Session of the
UN Women Executive Board
*15 February 2022***

[As delivered]

I would first like to thank the President of the Executive Board, H.E. Ambassador Rabab Fatima for her elegant, efficient and skillful leadership of the First Regular Session 2022. Congratulations, Madame President.

I also thank the Vice-Presidents for their substantive contributions. And I recognize the facilitators from the Permanent Missions of Iceland and Ukraine, Ms. Hildigunnur (Hilda) Engilbertsdóttir and Ms. Yaroslava Sochka, respectively, for their skillful guidance of the two decisions you have just adopted.

It is clear that trust and confidence have been built over the years between the Executive Board and UN-Women. This solid relationship will stand us in good stead as we embark on implementing UN-Women's Strategic Plan 2022-2025, which holds such promise for the acceleration of impact.

To all of you who participated in this session, my grateful thanks for your engagement and the interactive dialogue over the past two days. Our ability to have robust discussions is a precondition for success in further building this successful relationship.

In this regard, the high-level representation and wide range of Member States' statements yesterday was also notable. We value your collaboration with the Executive Board. We have carefully registered all your points and I am committed with my Deputies and all my staff to take the necessary action.

More specifically on the points raised during this session, I would like to recognize the opening statements from 26 Member States.

We share your deep, strongly stated concerns regarding the continued, devastating impact of COVID-19 on women and girls. The path to gender equality has become even steeper, as we face the final eight years to 2030.

In addition, we echo the Staff Council's expression of sympathy for colleagues' losses suffered through the pandemic. COVID-19's impact on our own personnel, and the related future of work are indeed high on our agenda. We are committed to creating a diverse and empowered workforce, to provide a safe and healthy workplace where everyone can get adequate mental health support and to tackle discrimination. This starts at home.

We also agree with you that UN-Women has a key role in getting us back on track during this decade of action. The transformative results that UN Women seeks to achieve in the new Strategic Plan are vital in this regard.

We heard and marked your calls to ensure that the Strategic Plan is fully incorporated at the regional and national level and for our work to be informed by national contexts and priorities. We also remain committed to strengthen and broaden partnerships in order to achieve transformative results for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

We heard your calls in support of the Action Coalitions, and we will be working on their integration into the implementation of the Strategic Plan to ensure the continuing impact of Generation Equality.

It was important that you highlighted the need for sufficient, predictable, timely and quality funding for the implementation of the Strategic Plan, in line with the commitments in the Funding Compact. I thank you for this. We rely on our funding partners to make sure we are resourced to do the job you have mandated us to do, at the same time as diversifying funding sources and expanding our partnerships.

Such changes are part of advances in the reform process. We appreciated the cross-regional statement made by Switzerland on the new Strategic Plans of the four Funds and Programmes and their contribution to a stronger and more impactful UN Development System. We will build on the impetus of the QCPR to mainstream gender equality work across the system in support of a joined-up approach.

Another important issue in this session's agenda was your ongoing support to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. Please allow me to reiterate that UN-Women is wholeheartedly committed to using our experience and expertise to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment both within UN-Women and across the UN system. Our 2022-2025 Strategic Plan includes the advancement of an inclusive culture and the nurturing of a diverse and empowered workforce within UN Women in order to holistically address the root causes of SEA and SH.

We also take duly note of your suggestions and recommendations on the meta-synthesis of evaluations managed by UN-Women. We intend to act on the findings provided by the evaluation and continue being ambitious to ensure accountability and learning.

We also heard your alarm about the infection rates of women and girls with HIV/AIDS, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, despite progress in testing and treatment coverage. The unavailability of services during the pandemic, which left women and girls more vulnerable to HIV, is also of considerable concern. However, the 2021 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS and its perspective on the intersection between gender equality and HIV/AIDS is energizing and is aligned with the new Strategic Plan's prioritization of close partnerships with UNAIDS and across the UN System.

Before I conclude, I would like to highlight the upcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women next month. CSW will focus this year on “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes”. This theme is the first such iteration for CSW. It is most timely for the Commission’s strong conclusions to meet the challenges that have been so well expressed by this Board in the last two days.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, UN-Women is committed to work even harder to deliver for women and girls, especially through our new Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

In closing, I would like to thank you all for making this such an engaging and substantive session. My first Board, thank you.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank and recognize the Secretary of the Executive Board, Jean-Luc Bories, and his highly efficient team who keep all aspects of this Board going, including the documentation, coordination, negotiations, logistics, communication and much more. Thank you, Jean-Luc and your team.

I thank you and I look forward to seeing the Executive Board again in June 2022 for the very important Annual Session of the Executive Board. We will do our utmost to make it an in-person meeting.

Thank you so much.