

**Opening Remarks of Ambassador Rabab Fatima, President of the UN
Women Executive Board at the
First Regular Session, 14-15 February 2022**

**Excellencies, Distinguished Vice Presidents, Madame Executive Director,
Distinguished Delegates,**

Good Morning.

It's my pleasure to welcome you to the first regular session of the UN Women Executive Board.

I extend a very warm welcome to Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, on behalf of the Bureau, and all Member States – to her first Executive Board session.

Madame Executive Director, I congratulate you on your appointment. You have taken up the helms of the organization at a time when its mandate has become central to the full delivery and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. You bring a wealth of experience and expertise to the post, which would greatly benefit the organization at this critical juncture. You can rest assured of my personal, as well as that of the Board's, full support and cooperation to you in carrying out your important work.

I am also very pleased to be working alongside distinguished colleagues, Vice-Presidents, Amb. Fanday Turay, Amb. Sergiy Kyslytsya, Amb. Maria del Carman Squeff and Amb. Jorundur Valtysson. The Bureau is committed to

strengthening the effectiveness of the Board's oversight function for improved governance. And we will count on the support and cooperation of all.

We are pleased to see that the Executive Director has already initiated measures to strengthen the relationship between the Executive Board and the Organization. We believe that this will allow for stronger collaboration between the Board and the Organization.

At the outset, I wish to thank and pay tribute to all staff and colleagues of UN Women, especially those on the frontline, in carrying out their important work for women and girls globally, with dedication and courage in the midst of the pandemic challenges.

Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues,

It is indeed a pity that we are having the first session of the year virtually. Despite our earnest efforts, the pandemic situation did not allow us to have an in-person session. I thank you for your understanding, support and willingness to adjust to the situation. This collaborative spirit will serve us well as we navigate our agenda during this difficult time.

Since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, the Executive Board has adjusted efficiently its working method to ensure full business continuity, thus enabling UN-Women to continue delivering on its mandate despite the unprecedented challenges.

But we all agree that this is not the ideal situation. We can only hope that the situation will improve enough for us to revert to the pre-pandemic arrangements. I am in close contact with the presidents of the other Boards, and would like to assure you that we will make every effort towards that end. I very much hope that we will be able to hold the annual session of the Board in person.

Excellencies,

Over the past decade, UN Women has made remarkable contributions to the lives of women and girls worldwide. Progress has been made in women's economic and political empowerment. Girls are going to school in greater numbers. More women are working and have economic independence, enabling them to decide about matters concerning their lives.

However, clearly much more needs to be done. We are still far behind in achieving Goal 5 of Agenda 2030, where only 1 of the 18 indicators is 'close to target'.

The pandemic has made the situation worse. The impacts of the pandemic on women have been disproportionately harsh. We are seeing a rapid slide-back of achievements made. An estimated 47 million women are likely to be pushed into extreme poverty because of job loss. Women working in the informal sector are the hardest hit.

Violence against women and girls is on a sharp rise. School closures have forced nearly 750 million girls to stay home, leading to growing risks of child

and early marriages among other abuses. And women in difficult situations: such as in conflict zones, refugee and migrant women, older women, and those on the frontline of climate and disasters, are at a greater risk of exploitation and abuse.

As we continue to grapple with these multifaceted global challenges, we need greater efforts to ensure full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all walks of life; for every woman, everywhere.

Excellencies,

I am encouraged to see the strong resolve of the Executive Director to lead the organization in the right direction at this critical time. Her efforts in particular to strengthen the intergovernmental mandate of UN Women, is very welcome.

As the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, I have expressed my strong desire to expand the bridging role of the Commission and explore greater collaboration with UN agencies, funds and programmes, as part of the UN's efforts to ensure system-wide coherence. And, I see tremendous scope for such collaboration between PBC and UN-Women, especially on Women, Peace and Security.

Excellencies,

The year 2022 will be an important one for UN-Women as it rolls out the implementation of its Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

The effective and timely implementation of the Strategic Plan is critical to ensuring the timely achievement of Agenda 2030, especially Goal 5.

Let me highlight a few specific points in this regard:

First, we would need to make sure that the Strategic Plan's implementation is impactful and cohesive on the ground, especially to ensure a just and equitable recovery from the pandemic. UN-Women should be guided by the 2030 Agenda and its overarching vision of "leaving no one behind".

For that to happen, we will encourage UN-Women to effectively leverage its unique triple mandate and strengthen its operational dimensions at the regional and national level; and ensure that its implementation is closely integrated with national Covid recovery measures.

There should be concerted efforts to close the gaps of gender inequalities and fragilities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. It is imperative to put enhanced focus on local solutions to tackle the most pressing challenges in the areas of education, health, job creation, and digital divide.

Needless to say, we need new and pragmatic ideas, effective partnership and collaboration, bringing together all stakeholders - the public and private sectors, NGOs, women's organizations, and international and regional financial institutions, to put women at the forefront of policies, especially now in the pandemic recovery efforts.

Second, the other important milestone at the Board this year, will be to analyze how UN-Women has been adapting the UN reforms agenda by **tracking** progress made in the implementation of the resolution 72/279 at its Annual Session. As always, the Board will continue to exercise its oversight role by **reviewing** the reports of the Board of Auditors, Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, Advisory Committee on Oversight.

We expect to also **receive** updates on the operational response at the regional level, implementation of recommendations contained in the independent victim-centered review of UN-Women's policies and processes on tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment; and **follow up** on the recommendations and decisions of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS Programme Coordinating Board meeting.

The reinvigorated UN Country Team's platform can play an important role towards that end through knowledge and experience-sharing in a wide range of areas, including capacity development of women, supporting women entrepreneurs, and ending gender-based violence and other discriminatory social norms that stand in the way of women's progress.

Third, at the field level, duplications, overlaps and gaps continue to remain a challenge, which often puts extra burden on the UN system, especially on its limited resources. Therefore, one of the key priorities and agenda of the UN-Women should be to ensure synergy and coherence among the UN agencies at the field, with the 2030 Agenda and with national plans and priorities.

I wish to stress here that business as usual can no longer be the way as we go forward. We must break the cycle of ineffective past practices and build a new culture of cooperation for implementation of SDG-5.

Finally, we will also look into the progress made on the financing of UN-Women by engaging later this year in the structured dialogue on financing, at the second regular session of the Executive Board in September.

Excellencies, Colleagues,

To deliver on this 2022 workplan, I am committed to work closely with all delegations to support and advise UN-Women in delivering on its mandate for better results for women and girls.

The Executive Director has agreed to have informal briefings with the different regional groups separately, under the leadership of the Vice Presidents. This will allow for a more in-depth focus on the regional challenges and priorities.

On my part, I see as critical, my close coordination with the other Presidents of the other Executive Boards. The 4 Board presidents have met and we agree on the need to continue the process of harmonization of the working methods of the Boards, and alignment of their interventions for a more effective delivery of the operational response of the UN system.

Besides, we also intend to meet with the Deputy Secretary General and other relevant senior management of the UNDS to ensure better synergy of our work.

Excellencies,

The oversight and policy guidance of the Executive Board would not be complete without actionable outcomes from the Executive Board. I thank the delegations of the Netherlands and Sweden who have introduced 2 draft decisions for this session, namely on: Audit and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment. My sincere appreciation goes to the delegations of Ukraine and Iceland, for facilitating those decisions, and the Secretariat for supporting them.

I also thank all delegations for their active participation in the consultations, and hope that the spirit of flexibility and accommodation will guide the negotiations, so that we can reach consensus on these important outcomes.

Excellencies,

Although UN Women is relatively young, the commitment of the United Nations as an organization in the area of gender equality is as old as the organization itself.

‘Gender equality’ is a cross-cutting theme of the Secretary General’s report on Our Common Agenda. In this report the Secretary General has proposed five inter-related transformative measures to end gender discrimination and ensure gender equality. He has also renewed his commitment to ensure gender parity across the UN system at all levels by 2028.

Realization of these transformative measures would require a stronger UN Women. In my national capacity I have already made this call loud and clear during the debate convened by the PGA last week on the SG's report. It is critically important to make UN-Women fit for purpose in taking on the role it is expected to play as the UN agency entrusted with achieving women's empowerment and gender equality.

Without gender equality we cannot ensure a sustainable and resilient recovery from the pandemic and achieve the 2030 Agenda.

I remain committed to working closely with all for advancing our shared goals of women's empowerment and gender equality. We must make good on our promises and commitments to bring about real change on the ground for the millions of women and girls globally, who are being left behind.

I thank you all.

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