

**Opening Remarks of Ambassador Rabab Fatima, President of the UN
Women Executive Board at the
Annual Session, 21-22 June 2022**

Excellencies, Madame Executive Director, Distinguished Colleagues.

We are meeting in-person for the first time in two years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. It's wonderful to be back; and I am keenly looking forward to a very productive and interactive session.

UN-Women deserve our thanks and commendation for staying on course in delivering its targets and fulfilling its mandate despite the challenging times that we are going through. I pay special tribute to all UN-Women staff out there in the field who are serving this organization and the women of this world with courage and commitment, sometimes in extremely difficult situations. Thank you!

Excellencies,

I also congratulate the Executive Director, Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, for her excellent leadership; especially for delivering a successful session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March this year.

We are pleased to see her efforts to strengthen the organization and make it fit for purpose. And in this regard, we welcome the important reform measures taken, including to strengthen relations with the Executive Board.

Madam Executive Director, you can rest assured of the Board's full support as you take forward your important initiatives and in all your efforts.

Distinguished Colleagues,

We are meeting at a time when the world is faced with a wide range of global challenges. While we are still struggling to recover from the devastations of the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine has aggravated the situation further. The world is facing a looming food, energy and financial crises. The most vulnerable countries, especially those affected by protracted conflicts and adverse impacts of climate change, are the hardest hit.

Women and girls continue to bear the worst brunt of these spiraling crises. Poverty, hunger, violence – all have women's face all over them. Women in conflict affected countries and humanitarian situations, women belonging to minority or indigenous groups, and migrants and refugee women are far worse off. Their unequal access to justice, resources and opportunities, often push them to the margins. We are at serious risk of going off track from achieving SDG-5.

UN-Women would need to rise to these challenges, and take a stronger lead in global efforts to protect women's rights, and achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, for all women, everywhere. And for that, we would need to strengthen UN-Women, including through scaling up its field presence and enhancing its coordinating capacity at all levels within the UN system, and at the country level.

Excellencies,

We are encouraged to see the achievements made during the 2018-2021 Strategic Plan period, particularly in advancing women's economic empowerment, leadership and participation in governance, peace and security, and humanitarian action. UN-Women's efforts in addressing violence against women, especially through the UN Trust Fund to end violence against women, are commendable.

And now, as we grapple with the interlinked challenges posed by Covid, conflict and climate crisis, we would need to ensure the effective and timely implementation of the current Strategic Plan (2022-2025).

Let me highlight a few specific points in this regard:

First, we need to make sure that the implementation of the Strategic Plan is impactful and cohesive on the ground, especially in ensuring that women remain at the front and center of our efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda. For that I cannot stress enough the urgent need for more gender-responsive strategies, guided by the overarching vision of "leaving no one behind".

We wish to see closer and stronger engagements with the programme countries to ensure that the solutions offered to them are based on national priorities and sensitive to local contexts. At the same time, UN-Women's programmes should foster inclusion and empowerment of the most vulnerable women, especially women in the LDCs, LLDCs, SIDs and other vulnerable countries.

Second: There must be concerted efforts to close the gaps of gender inequalities and fragilities that have been further exacerbated by the global emergencies, climate crisis and instability.

The need of the hour is to ensure a gender-responsive recovery effort from the pandemic. For that we need enhanced focus on empowerment of women and girls in the areas of education, health, job creation, and digital connectivity. Equally important is to prioritize implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in order to ensure full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding and sustaining peace, tackling humanitarian emergencies, as well as climate change and disaster risk reduction.

The agreed conclusions of the CSW-66 are an important progress in this regard. We would encourage the UN Women to leverage this as a compass for UN Women's actions ahead.

Third: the other important benchmark for the Board this year is to take stock and analyze how UN-Women has been adapting to the UN reforms agenda by tracking progress made in the implementation of the resolution 72/279.

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 entrepreneurship, and ending gender-based violence and other discriminatory social norms that stand in the way of women's progress.

We encourage UN- Women to step up its efforts to ensure synergy and coherence among the UN agencies at the field, with the 2030 Agenda and with national plans and priorities.

Finally, for achieving the ambitious goals and targets set by the Strategic Plan, we would need new and pragmatic ideas, effective partnership and collaboration, bringing together all stakeholders - the public and private sectors, NGOs, CBOs, women's organizations, and international and regional financial institutions.

I wish to emphasize the importance of enhanced coordination between national governments and other key stakeholders, in order to ensure an inclusive and sustainable pathway to implement the current Strategic Plan on the ground in the most effective and efficient manner.

Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues,

During this Session, we have before us several official reports which include:

- the Executive Director's Annual Report;
- the evaluation function of UN-Women;
- the corporate evaluation of UN-Women's work on policy advocacy; and
- the internal audit and investigation and UN-Women's related management responses.

We also look forward to a number of briefings on UN-Women's operational responses in Latin American and the Caribbean; receive an update on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system; as well as, an update on the implementation of recommendations in the independent victim-centred review of UN-Women policies and processes on tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

Distinguished Colleagues,

The oversight and policy guidance of the Executive Board would not be complete without actionable outcomes to our Executive Board official meetings. We have before us four draft decisions, which I name in no particular order:

- The Annual Report of the Under-Secretary General/Executive Director on the Strategic Plan 2018-2021;
- The report on the evaluation function of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2021;
- The report on internal audit and investigation activities for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2021; and
- The implementation of GA resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the UN Development System.

I would like to thank the delegations of Argentina, Iceland, the Republic of Korea, and Sierra Leone for facilitating these decisions; and I thank the Secretariat colleagues for their support. I hope we can reach consensus on these important outcomes; and I will count on your flexibility and understanding to ensure a successful outcome of this session.

Excellencies,

‘Gender equality’ is a cross-cutting theme of the Secretary General’s report on Our Common Agenda. In his report the Secretary General has proposed five inter-related transformative measures to end gender discrimination and ensure gender equality. The upcoming Transforming Education Summit and the Future Summit will provide us a good opportunity to close the gender gaps in education, and bridge the digital divide as well as in creating a future with equal opportunities for all women and girl; everywhere.

It is critically important that UN Women seizes this opportunity to further advance gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

I remain committed to working closely with all to realize our shared goals. 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.
