

**Opening speech by Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka at the Annual session of the Executive Board
27 June 2016 [as delivered]**

Mr. President, Members of the Executive Board, Distinguished delegates, colleagues and friends.

First of all, let me thank Ambassador Mohamed Khaled Khiari for his leadership as the President of the Executive Board, and for being a true champion for gender equality and the work of UN Women. Together with your excellent Bureau, you have clearly shown your strong engagement in the serious work of the Board. This was evident in May this year when all the members of the Bureau participated in the Joint Field Visit to Kyrgyzstan. These visits on-the-ground help us to communicate better what we do in the field, and are an opportunity for the Bureau to witness the heart of UN Women's work. I thank the Bureau for taking the time to make the field visit and for their personal engagement through the year to date in the work of UN Women.

I also want to thank all Member States for their guidance and support in the consultation process for the mid-term review. I would also like to thank the vice-presidents for their important role during this session in facilitating constructive and fruitful negotiations. We now have a new vice-president of the Board, Ms. Kitty Sweeb from Suriname, to represent the Latin America and Caribbean Group. I thank Ms. Miriam Macintosh of Suriname for her work to date and welcome the new member of the Bureau. I look forward to working with you as well.

I welcome the Chair of our Audit Advisory Committee who is with us today. She and another member of the Committee visited our Regional Office in Panama and our Country Office in Paraguay earlier this year. I was pleased to hear their positive impressions of UN Women's impact in the region. I continue to receive valuable advice from the Committee on how we can improve our work.

A world in crisis

We meet at a challenging time. Our world is plagued by continuing violations of the rights of women and girls, threats to peace and security, climate shocks, slow economic recovery, global health pandemics, growing migration and a refugee crisis. These all have a disproportionately heavy effect on women and girls. We are also still to learn the full impact of the exit of a valued member from the European Union.

Despite the changes in the world we have to keep the promise of leaving no one behind. We must not allow backsliding on equality, rights and empowerment of women and girls. Women and girls are the backbone to ending poverty, and ensuring a healthier, inclusive world.

The agenda for this session

2015 was a historic year with momentous achievements that are represented by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We all worked hard for gender equality and women's

empowerment to be front and centre of what was agreed upon. Your relentless pursuit of the gender equality objective has put UN Women in a unique position of responsibility and importance within the 2030 Agenda, and we thank you for that.

During this two-day session, your deliberations will provide direction to further enhance the full and effective implementation of our Strategic Plan 2014-2017. This will ensure that our focus stays tightly on target and on being 'fit for purpose'. The mid-term review of the Strategic Plan provides the evidence and the analysis to facilitate this.

Mid-term review of the strategic plan

Let me share with you some of what I see to be the strengths of the mid-term review. It has entrenched the focus on results. In response to the Board's request in its decision 2015/2, we have incorporated summarized information on progress made on the integrated results framework. We have provided greater analysis of factors that drive or hinder performance and results.

The mid-term review has enhanced constructive partnerships to harmonize standards and methods for performance measurement. It has stimulated innovation. New features include an annex focused on the implementation of the QCPR, as requested by the Board, and a mini-online interactive version of the MTR.

The results

We know that results count. They must be measured wherever we can. The first two years of implementation of the strategic plan point to some encouraging results and some positive successes. At the mid-point of the strategic plan, UN Women's progress against its targets for 2017 is positive, with 71% of all targets are achieved or on track.

The achievements are often a result of several years of engagement and advocacy, where UN Women has played a supportive role in collaboration with partners such as Member States and Civil Society. In the past two years, this effective collaboration has made a difference in areas that are key to long-term success

Political participation and leadership

In 2015, 32 new laws were adopted to promote women's political participation. We congratulate all those countries that have done well in this area, for example Mexico, where women parliamentarians are now 42 per cent of government. It is a privilege to continue to collaborate with key stakeholders in Mexico, and to work with Bolivia, the second country in the world to reach gender parity in parliament.

We are encouraged that right now women around the world are contesting some of the highest political offices - in Ghana, Haiti Somalia, United States of America, and Zambia.

Women are also in the running for the role of Secretary-General of the United Nations – a position that has never been occupied by a woman.

It is indeed crucial that the UN lead by example. We therefore welcome the Deputy Secretary-General's announcement last month that the UN will increase the percentage of women at all levels and areas in our work by 40% by 2020, and achieve a 50% fully balanced UN workforce by 2030. UN Women has actively supported this process in our coordinating role.

In all the countries where we work, we vigorously support women's leadership, including in full representation on all panels and the inclusion of youth.

Women's economic empowerment

Economic empowerment also has shown some progress. Twenty-nine countries have adopted a gender-responsive policy framework for women's economic empowerment. In the Pacific, market vendors associations that we support now have more than 60 per cent of women in leadership positions. In this capacity they positively influence decisions on market budgets and infrastructure improvements that benefit women vendors.

In Brazil, Egypt and South Africa, our partnership with Coca-Cola has provided some 46,000 women with the necessary skills, equipment and access to credit to initiate and successfully manage their businesses. In South Africa alone, the programme contributed to some 24,000 micro enterprises.

Ending Violence Against Women

Ending violence against women and girls remains a difficult area, but there are some signs of progress. Twenty-six countries have strengthened legislation to address all forms of violence against women. We also welcome that in China, a new law on domestic violence was adopted after several years of technical assistance by a UN task force co-led by UN Women.

The UNITE campaign, which advocates for ending violence against women, has grown stronger. It has received growing public support. Some 70 countries participated in the 2015 "Orange the World" campaign during the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. In these campaigns we are joined by people all over the world - men and women, and increasingly Civil Society and Member States - who work together on this.

Women, peace and security

Eighteen more countries adopted National Action Plans on women, peace and security, and 67 per cent of all National Action Plans now have indicators to monitor progress.

We have given sustained support for the Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy. Last month at the "Syrian Women Peacemakers" conference in Beirut, more than 130 Syrian women overcame significant political divides to forge a unified coalition for peace. They demanded more representation of women in the formal peace process, and supported the role

of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board that we help to establish in the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura.

Last week Colombia finalized a historic peace agreement between the Government and the FARC, in which women played an important role. Again, we have worked closely to support these outstanding women. We presented the Global Study which reviewed 15 years of implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. We have begun to implement the recommendations of the Study.

Financing GEWE

On financing gender equality and women's empowerment, 31 countries that we collaborate with have increased their budget allocations for gender equality commitments.

Civil society

A common thread across all areas has been the central role of gender equality advocates in advancing a rights-based agenda, especially civil society and the women's movement.

We have worked through our 39 civil society advisory groups, and through a constellation of other partnerships to advance the agenda. For example, since inception, the Fund for Gender Equality has supported 120 grantee programmes in 80 countries, with more than 10 million direct beneficiaries.

Humanitarian crises: Migrants and refugees

The UN Women offices engaged in humanitarian activities have increased, from 12 countries in 2014 to 34 in 2015. In Nepal, UN Women facilitated the engagement of local women's groups in the response to the earthquake and advocated for sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators. UN Women supported a wide range of humanitarian assessments, including in Cameroon, Iraq, Jordan, Rwanda, Uganda, and Ukraine. In Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, UN Women developed a multi-country resilience-based approach to humanitarian response.

Excellencies, as you know, UN Women currently holds the rotating Chair of the Global Migration Group for 2016. In this role we have set out to ensure that both women and men are impacted positively by the Group's work and elevate the focus on women in migration debates. We have managed to support the Global Forum on Migration and Development in strengthening focus on women and girls. This includes increasing the mention of women and girls in the concept paper for the 9th Global Forum on Migration and Development from zero mentions to a total of 50 mentions.

At the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, UN Women led a High Level Roundtable on Women and Girls, chaired by the leaders of Croatia, Ireland, Sweden and Samoa, with the Deputy Secretary-General as the opening moderator. We intend to follow up on the key outcomes of the Summit that impact on women and girls.

Institutional performance

Our country operations are the front line of an increasingly robust operational programme. Our institutional performance shows steady progress: 66 per cent of our targets are achieved or on track. After five years of operations, UN Women has built effective systems for performance management and reporting, financial accountability, audit, human resource management, risk management, operational infrastructure and has a strong evaluation function.

I am pleased to report that UN Women looks forward to receiving an unqualified audit opinion on its financial statements from the UN Board of Auditors for the fifth consecutive year.

UN coordination, strategic partnerships, advocacy, communications and the knowledge-hub functions continue to support the delivery of results. Here are just a few indicative highlights to illustrate the range. In terms of strategic partnerships, following their commitments to HeForShe, our 10 corporate IMPACT Champions have committed to achieve gender parity in boards and management by 2020. In September, our 10 university Champions will commit to their own significant steps with time bound targets. In terms of advocacy and communications: we have 6.6 million visitors to the UN Women and WomenWatch websites; and UN Women social media platforms reached 3 million followers in 2015, up from 135,000 followers in 2011.

Our report *Progress of the World's Women: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* (2015/2016) continues to contribute to the global discourse on the care economy involving policy makers and activists. This is enhancing UN Women's leadership in knowledge management. One hundred and sixty-nine countries participated in the review of 20 years of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Our country offices helped dozens of countries to produce valuable insights that identified both progress and challenges. These marks of steady progress against our targets encourage us.

Gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Through the implementation of our strategic plan, UN Women will support the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda in line with the guidance of the 60th session of the Commission of the Status of Women. Our analysis shows that the strategic plan contributes to the achievement of at least 13 SDGs.

Implementing the Strategic Plan in 2016-17

Given the continued relevance of the strategic plan, we do not propose significant changes in thematic focus. We have proposed adjustments to targets and indicators to improve measurability and align where possible with proposed SDG indicators that are results-oriented.

Our ability to leverage our triple mandate of normative support, UN coordination and operational activities is enabling results. It represents a major asset that we will fully tap into in support of SDG implementation.

We are already working as part of UN Country Teams to support implementation at country level. Our focus is to work with governments and civil society national partners to integrate

gender equality commitments into development plans, budgets, and institutional arrangements for SDG implementation. We are working with national women's machineries to make sure the 2030 Agenda delivers for women and girls at country level.

Among the 64 UN entities there has been a 15 per cent increase in entities meeting or exceeding UN-SWAP requirements. We are also preparing a country-level UN-SWAP to have a common UN accountability framework aligned with the SDGs to spearhead joint UN action. This will be piloted this year.

UN Women will support an open, inclusive and transparent engagement with civil society, especially women's organizations, in follow-up and review processes, in consultation with Member States.

Through the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, whose work is strongly aligned to Goal 5, we are working to produce concrete actions in six areas: eliminating legal barriers to women's economic empowerment; addressing the care economy; reducing gender pay gaps; expanding opportunities for women who work in the informal sector; promoting financial and digital inclusion for women; and fostering female entrepreneurship and enhancing the productivity of women-owned enterprises. In this report we will position women in their rightful place as game-changers of the 21st century who can and will create inclusive economies.

McKinsey estimates that if women's participation in the marketplace in every country matched the best-performing country in their region, this would add as much as 12 trillion dollars in annual GDP by 2025. This is a message that needs positive action and response at local as well as at global levels.

Addressing constraints

Through the mid-term review we were able to reflect on some of the constraints that UN Women has faced in the last two years: the need to improve our programmatic focus and use our limited resources strategically; the need to support programmes with effective operational systems that allow us to deliver on time, on scope, on budget. Our offices still face operational bottlenecks, cumbersome procedures and unclear processes that delay programme implementation. Resource constraints hamper progress, and prevent sustainability and scaling up of successful correctional interventions. At the same time, we also recognize that we can do more to track resource gaps and quantify their impact on results.

Our Flagship Programming Initiatives also respond to a number of lessons learned from the midterm review: they improve our programmatic focus; further integrate our triple mandate; address multiple SDGs through one set of interventions, and allow us to significantly scale up transformative results for women and girls.

Our business process re-engineering initiative responds to identified operational limitations. The senior management team have adopted new processes and are rolling them out for donor reporting, project design and fast-track procedures for crisis situations.

Fostering innovation

Innovation is a key strategy to achieve results. This will be an agenda item at the second regular session of the Executive Board this September.

We will be considering targeted strategies to leverage technology in support of women's empowerment. For example, as part of a pilot programme, this summer 5000 women farmers will be trained in Rwanda on climate-resilient agro-technologies. They will be linked through a cloud-based system to global supply chains, providers of goods and services, as well as to information and financing. UN Women is part of the pathfinders within the UN system in using cloud-based technology in-house. We will also make sure technology serves the rights agenda and the ending of discrimination against women.

Conclusion

Women and girls are not passive and helpless beneficiaries. They are first and foremost solution makers, an army of peacemakers and game changers the world is yet to fully engage. The mid-term review underlines this principle, which remains at the core of our strategic plan. Lessons from this review will feed into the next strategic plan, 2018-2021. A detailed road map for its development will be presented to the Executive Board later in September.

We will be informed by Member States' guidance as part of the QCPR process this year. We need the QCPR to be bold and to have a focus on gender equality to provide the UN system with a solid foundation to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In short, we need greater capacity for our coordination mandate in a 2030 Agenda in which women and girls are front and centre.

The ongoing development of more robust systems and tools for programming and reporting will also inform the development process for the next strategic plan.

Our work must make sure that the widespread violation of women's rights is turned around, and that we leave no one behind.

Thank you.