

***Opening Remarks by Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, at the UN Women Executive Board Annual Session 2018***

*(As delivered)*

Madame President,  
Members of the Executive Board,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Colleagues and friends,

Good morning.

Firstly, let me thank Ambassador Ivana Pajevic for her engagement as the President of the Executive Board, her open dialogue with the senior management and myself, and her interest in the UN Development System reform process and willingness to ensure that the Executive Board supports UN Women with any changes that we will need to make in this regard.

I also extend my appreciation to the President and the entire Bureau for their participation in the joint field visit to Uganda as well as the UN Women field visit in Malawi. And of course, for the active involvement that the President has shown, including making time to brief me and to clarify and share her insights from the visit. Madame President, I also appreciate the fact that you were able to engage with the President of Malawi and the President of Uganda on important issues of gender equality.

Thank you also to the Vice-Presidents for facilitating the decisions that are negotiated during this session.

I want to welcome our new Assistant-Secretary-General, Åsa Regnér, who has already hit the ground running. She brings a wealth of experience as a feminist and activist, a former Country Representative of UN Women in Bolivia, and recently Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality in Sweden.

We are going through changes that will make the UN a greater force of good in a world that faces extreme challenges. They will mean adjustment and adaptation, but ultimately, more opportunities to make the world better.

I hope that over the next two days we can discuss in a spirit of determined cooperation that will ensure a successful outcome.

Distinguished Delegates,

On 31 May, the General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution on the repositioning of the UN Development System.

Thank you to many of you who helped to make that possible. I particularly also want to thank the Permanent Representative of Denmark who also played a significant role, and who I think is with us in the house today.

The resolution's implementation will bring profound changes to the way we work. It will leverage the Resident Coordinators to ensure the UN works better together. And develop a new generation of UN Country Teams that can respond better to the needs of countries—whether they be least developed or middle-income—realizing that they all have challenges and no one size does fit all.

UN Women fully supports this bold new agenda, which must work for women and girls so that we achieve gender equality by 2030 in as many countries as possible and leave no one behind.

We are actively engaged in the transition led by the Deputy Secretary-General and as part of the UN Sustainable Development Group.

We welcome the attention placed on the UNDAF as the main operational tool of the UNCT going forward. UN Women co-led the development of the last UNDAF and we continue to be involved in its updating process. We are keen to ensure that all UNDAF and CCA maintain a strong focus on human rights and gender equality and on leaving no one behind.

We are also working together with UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA, at both technical level and between our four Assistant Secretary-Generals, to implement the Common Chapter through joint initiatives at the global, regional and country level. Since January, we began 14 new initiatives under the umbrella of the Common Chapter in which we are working together on at least one of the six thematic areas at regional and country level. The issue of coordination therefore has taken a much stronger meaning for us at UN Women.

Building on the experience of the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, we will develop funding compacts to scale up our joint actions, which we hope our partners will support. We are planning to report on Common Chapter implementation in a joint annex attached to each agencies' annual results report, in addition to embedding specific aspects in the report itself.

UN Women is well prepared for the changes called for by the General Assembly resolution. This is because we are ourselves a product of UN reform, representing those at highest risk of being left behind, and because we anticipated these changes during the preparation of our Strategic Plan.

The first seven years of UN Women's existence have been key to collecting important lessons, which can now be applied as we further adapt to the changes around us. We can build on the lessons learned from recent evaluations, especially the regional architecture evaluation, the UN coordination function evaluation and the strategic partnerships evaluation. We are strongly committed to fully implementing the management response to the evaluation on the regional architecture.

Last year, we took steps in this direction. Building on the principles in the Strategic Plan, we are finalizing the analysis needed to adjust to a differentiated field presence based on concrete criteria, as called for in our Strategic Plan. We will make sure to take into account criteria identified for the new generation of UN Country Teams. As several evaluations have pointed out, it is essential that UN Women remain present in a meaningful way at the country level, particularly where it is needed most.

We have updated the HQ functional analysis to look at our HQ structure, business processes and ensure there are no gaps in HQ support to the field. Of course, this is a work in progress.

We have completed the review of the Delegation of Authority and Internal Control Framework Policies; and fully implemented the recommendations of the review of Regional Office capacities so that their role is clearer and their capacity aligned to their functions.

We have established a corporate Knowledge Management Group and a new Knowledge Management Specialist has joined us. Our revised Knowledge Management Strategy will be ready in the coming weeks.

We will build on these actions to further align our operating model and structure to the requests of the General Assembly, and ensure that we fully implement our Strategic Plan by 2021.

In the coming weeks, we would like to come to you with a strategy to ensure that we are fit for purpose for the changes ahead of us, so that when we reach our next Board in September we have a solid plan for moving forward. As the Secretary-General said, we need to hit the ground running by January 1st.

Distinguished Delegates,

These changes take place in a trajectory of growth and positive developments in UN Women.

Last year, UN Women achieved its highest revenue target since inception – USD 369 million. There has been particularly strong growth in non-core resources (USD 214.2 million, a 20 per cent increase since 2016). Core resources increased to USD 146.4.

While we are still short of the funding targets in the Integrated Budget, our growth has been impressive and testimony to the confidence that donors have placed in us.

For instance, we have just signed a multi-year agreement with Sweden (USD 62 million over four years), and we thank them for their steadfast support.

Our Annual Report shows that our performance is strong. At the end of our four-year cycle, 80 per cent of targets have been fully or largely met.

In 2017 alone, we contributed to the amendment or reform of 27 laws in 17 countries to strengthen women's rights.

Since 2014, an additional 2 billion women and girls live in countries where policy frameworks for women's economic empowerment were strengthened. That is 41 countries.

Over 1.5 billion women and girls in 52 countries are better protected from violence through stronger legal frameworks.

And more than 1.48 billion women and girls are benefitting from an increase in budget allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment, out of a total of 43 countries.

These results complement our work to support the strengthening and implementation of global norms.

In 2017, we worked with Member States to bring a strong gender equality focus to the Ministerial Declaration of the High-Level Political Forum.

We engaged in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, with the COP adopting a historic Gender Action Plan.

The recommendations of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel (HLP) on Women's Economic Empowerment have led to actions in key areas.

One, to tackle the roots of discrimination, we formed the Unstereotype Alliance with private sector partners, where we are working to address the stereotypes perpetuated by their marketing and advertising. With a membership of 20 companies, it celebrates its one-year anniversary this week at the Cannes Lions Festival and will admit 10 new members. The next phase will be the presentation of advertisements that break away from stereotypes.

Later today we will sign a USD 6.5 million agreement with the UAE's NAMA Women Advancement Establishment to support our Flagship Programme, Stimulating Equal Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs. It focuses on the area of procurement, amongst others, something which was a direct result of UAE's membership in the HLP.

Since 2014, we have supported an average annual participation of 2,500 officials and more than 3,700 civil society representatives at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). In CSW 62, we supported a record number of women from rural areas.

We also delivered on our knowledge-hub function. Over 7.5 million practitioners accessed expert knowledge at [endVAWnow.org](http://endVAWnow.org); and more than 100,000 people have been trained by the Training Centre.

We have also made significant progress to improve our institutional performance.

Social media followers grew from 640,000 in 2014 to 6.5 million last year.

We developed the second generation of the UN SWAP. Over 94 per cent of entities reported on the framework for six consecutive years, most demonstrating significant improvements.

And 1.3 million men and boys committed to HeForShe. But we still want more. Today we are launching a dedicated page to capture HeForShe commitments of UN staff.

We are engaging collaboratively with other agencies to implement the Secretary-General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity and its objective of reaching parity within the UN System by 2028. We have supported UN entities with their implementation plans, including through capacity-building for their Gender Focal Points, and are drafting guidelines for a more enabling environment within the UN System.

We have also stepped up our response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and sexual harassment, within and outside of the UN system. UN Women has to be fully engaged and lead in this area.

In light of the criticality of the response, I have asked my Director of Policy, Purna Sen, to act as Executive Coordinator and Spokesperson on Addressing Sexual Harassment and Other Forms of Discrimination.

Like the rest of the UN system, we have a zero-tolerance policy for SEA and sexual harassment. Our response places survivors at its heart and listens to their stories, whether they are staff, partners or beneficiaries or ordinary women and girls. Any successful approach must also recognize that sexual harassment is the result of power imbalances and deeply-rooted patriarchy.

We have established a network of focal points on addressing sexual exploitation and abuse at HQ and Regional Offices to guide staff on reporting allegations.

I am encouraged by the level of cooperation I have seen within our UN family—we have worked very closely with UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF—including by cost sharing on the development of our mandatory courses and other awareness-raising tools. We are proud to lead prevention of SEA efforts in some countries like Haiti, Sudan and Sierra Leone, working with survivors, providing training to Gender Focal Points and other members of the UN Country Teams.

The Secretary-General has set up a CEB task force on sexual harassment, led by USG Jan Beagle, to review and strengthen sexual harassment policies and practice for the UN system. I am pleased to share that UN Women is co-chairing the work to develop a model policy in this regard.

Tomorrow at lunchtime we will hold an informal briefing on UN Women's actions to strengthen the protection of populations from sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by its personnel and to address sexual harassment in the workplace. This will provide an opportunity for an open and frank discussion about how UN Women is cleaning its own house when it comes to both SEA and sexual harassment.

Distinguished delegates,

In these times of change, UN Women can also count on a strong foundation for transparency and accountability.

I am happy to report that UN Women has received a clean audit for the 6th consecutive year.

The establishment of our in-house consolidated oversight unit is well underway. The independent evaluation and internal audit functions are co-located under one leadership while maintaining their operational and functional independence and integrity.

I am pleased to inform you that I will soon appoint the Director of Independent Evaluation and Audit.

I have already appointed the Chief, Internal Audit Service, and she is with us today. Her name is Malika Mukhitdinova.

I have also approved a risk-based workplan for 2018, which includes nine country office audits and one headquarters audit with 20 DIM Project audits in 15 different countries.

I would like to thank our Interim Director, Verasak Liengsrirawat, for making sure that there was no gap in internal audit while the new unit was being set up.

I have also appointed Inga Sniukaite as the Chief, Independent Evaluation Service. She is leading the implementation of the evaluation work plan.

I highly value the lessons we have received over the years from high-quality evaluations, which supported organizational learning, change management processes and strategic decision-making needed to adapt to the changes ahead of us.

The report on the evaluation function shows significant progress across all performance indicators.

At this session, we will discuss the corporate evaluation of our Contributions to Women's Political Participation and Leadership, which looked at how we can work more systemically, both internally and within the UN Development System. It assessed our efforts using a deeper analysis of the intersectionality within our work. It provides useful information to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan by looking at how we can work more systemically, both internally and within the UN Development System. We agree with the recommendations and will take actions in the management response.

Distinguished Delegates,

I am proud of how far UN Women has come since I joined in 2013—not because of me, because of the team.

I look forward to the years ahead within a repositioned UN Development System that delivers more for all, especially for women and girls.

A key contribution of UN Women has been its ability to elevate the voices of grassroots women and take the gender equality agenda to the highest level wherever we have an opportunity.

I saw this in action earlier this month at the European Development Days in Brussels, which were focused on gender equality and women's empowerment and highlighted the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, amongst others. We are also working with the EU to scale up the Women's Empowerment Principles in G7 and Latin American countries over the next three years.

I was part of Canada's Gender Equality Advisory Council for the G7 Presidency. I am grateful to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for inviting UN Women to this process.

I encourage you to read the full Council's report. It calls for 20 per cent of all aid to go to programmes that benefit gender equality and women and girls.

It also recommends policy actions, such as addressing unpaid care work, strengthening legislation for decent work and pay equity, supporting women in the informal sector, and improving access to new technologies.

Particular attention is paid to violence against women in the workplace. We support the emerging ILO standard to end violence and harassment at work.

It was significant that G7 leaders discussed gender equality and women's empowerment for two full hours and that gender perspectives were systematically mainstreamed in other G7 themes.

I am encouraged by their commitment to removing barriers to women's participation and decision-making, reducing the gender pay gap and recognizing unpaid care work. And I welcome the nearly USD 3 billion commitment to girls' education. And the commitment by G7 development finance institutions to mobilize USD 3 billion by 2020 for women's empowerment.

This therefore, in our eyes, was a successful summit.

Distinguished delegates,

The changes that we are navigating together will be both exciting and challenging.

The role of the Executive Board is essential to ensuring that we make the most of the opportunities we have. We will depend on your guidance.

Yannick, Asa, my Senior Management Team and the entire UN Women team everywhere in the world are energized and committed to this moment and the window of renewal that it opens.

We thank you for your support and advice, as we move into a new era in the UN System and a brighter future for all women and girls.