



***Remarks by Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, at the UN-Women Executive Board Informal briefing on UN-Women’s work and approach to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities***

Wednesday, 12 September 2018

*[As delivered]*<sup>1</sup>

Thank you to Mr. Jyrki Terva, Vice-President of the UN Women Executive Board, members of the panel, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, and to our guests here, and those following us online, who will hopefully stay with us throughout this journey.

I am excited that we are now in a position to share a solid roadmap of the work we are doing for women and girls with disabilities.

We know that 1 out of 5 women around the world has a disability. This is too significant a minority for us not to have a strategy to address their needs. When these women are systemically marginalized – on the grounds of age, sex and disability, or any other factor –that hinders their equal participation in society.

Gender-neutral approaches to disability also perpetuate this discrimination and vulnerability, and part of our job as UN Women is to really find a targeted and measured way of addressing women and girls with disabilities. This is why we must urgently mainstream gender equality into all policies and programmes related to persons with disabilities.

Women and girls with disabilities are not a homogenous group. That is also important to take into account. They experience various types of impairments, from physical to psychosocial, and from intellectual to sensory conditions, and they represent multiple and intersecting identities, such as different ethnic groups, religions and races. They are refugees; they are migrants and asylum-seekers; they are displaced; they are LGBTI persons. They may live with HIV and AIDS. They are young, they are old, they are in households that are headed by single women. All of those multiple and intersecting identities present particular challenges.

This is why we need an inclusive approach that is also intersectional. This requires a paradigm shift, where all women and girls with disabilities, in all their diversity and across their life course, are included and considered as equal partners across the development-humanitarian continuum, and also that their rights and agency are fully realized.

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<sup>1</sup> Webcast available at: <http://webtv.un.org/watch/empowerment-of-women-and-girls-with-disabilities/5834147781001/>. Opening remarks: minute 1:40 - 8:39.

Women with disabilities are not expecting just to be serviced. They are actors in their own right and they play a critical role in determining their future and their destiny.

In order to achieve the levels of progress that we desire, we must overcome hurdles, such as: ad hoc funding process and a siloed approach, which lead to ineffective and inefficient responses. We hope that today we will hear a little bit more about these hurdles.

In 2017, UN Women established an internal task team on disability and inclusion with focal points from various units at HQ, regional and country offices. Our Strategic Plan 2018-2021 states that we will support women with disabilities to reach decision-making positions, and gender responsive disability programming; we will continue to strengthen our special relationship with women's organizations and networks, and pay particular attention to organizations of persons with disabilities.

We are also in the process of finalizing a Strategy for the Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities. It will support the full inclusion and meaningful participation of women and girls with disabilities across our priority areas and review our accessibility. Our East and Southern Africa Office is developing its own strategy.

Our offices have been increasingly reporting on their work in this area. In 2017, close to 30 offices reported work with or related to women with disabilities, in all regions and under all impact areas. UN Women continues to lead in new areas such as gender-responsive budgeting and women with disabilities through pilot experiences in India and Sri Lanka; and working with organizations of persons with disabilities to address violence against women in the Pacific, including through Safe Cities initiative.

The United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women opened a special window to address violence against women and girls with disabilities in 2017. Through that window, nine grantees were awarded and were announced this year at the Global Disability Summit in London in July 2018. UN Women is also committed to strengthening collection of data that is disaggregated by disability.

We are currently in the process of finalizing a baseline survey of our personnel. This will inform the development of a human resources action plan on personnel with disabilities. I have previously remarked on a lack of representation at the most senior levels in the United Nations; we do not have an Under Secretary-General with disability. At UN Women, we also have to put our house in order.

In the context of UN reform and the recent Executive Committee decisions on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, we have the unique opportunity to effectively mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities in all their diversity in all aspects of life and at all levels.

I look forward to the ideas we will share today and the enhanced attention that we can all pay to this critical area.

Thank you.