

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

10 September 2018

[As delivered]

Madame President, Members of the Executive Board, distinguished delegates, colleagues and friends, good morning.

First, let me thank Ambassador Ivana Pajević for her sincere dedication as President of the Executive Board this year. Good job, President, we really thank you. Under her leadership, UN Women has increasingly engaged in open dialogue with the Bureau and Member States. I thank the Ambassador for her invaluable advice and support throughout the year whenever we needed to speak to her.

I extend my gratitude to the Executive Board Bureau: Christine Kalamwina, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zambia, Joo Il Lee, Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea, Jyrki Terva, Minister Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Finland; As well as Desirée Cedeño, Attaché at the Permanent Mission of Panama.

Thank you to the entire Bureau for your dedication to the implementation of the Board's workplan, including the many informal briefings, and the facilitation of the Board decisions.

The transparent dialogue that we have with the Board is yet another example of our excellent working relations, as seen in the preliminary analysis of the implications of the UN repositioning.

Under the leadership of this Bureau, I have also been able to attend more Bureau meetings and found this direct engagement to be a very effective form of exchanging views with Member States and getting guidance on matters of mutual concern. Thank you for devoting this amount of time in order to ensure that we have frequent dialogue.

I would also like to thank the delegates for their demonstrated commitment during the joint field visit of the Executive Boards to Uganda as well as the UN Women visit to Malawi.

We appreciate your deep engagement with the difficult realities of women and girls at country level, understanding the challenges of our operations, and bringing these invaluable insights back to the conference rooms here in Headquarters.

We look forward to hearing your impressions of these field visits, because this is where we tell our story and you give feedback about whether the world that we do makes a difference. This is where we see the effect of UN Women's work in the daily lives of women and girls. And this is

the living proof of the need for UN Women's continued strong representation as the UN Reform process is rolled out. I will speak more on this matter under later items.

Distinguished delegates, I would like to introduce three new Senior Appointments to you: Our brand new Director of Communications and Advocacy, Tia T. Gordon, who joined us this August; Fernando Gutierrez-Eddy Chief of Resource Mobilization and Donors Relations; and Lisa Sutton, who will come on board on the 1st November as Director of the office of Independent Evaluation and Internal Audit Services (IEAS). We will hear more about the item on evaluation later.

We very much look forward to moving in exciting new directions under the leadership of these new employees.

But today is also somehow bittersweet, as it marks the last Executive Board session with our Assistant Secretary-General for Policy and Programme, Yannick Glemarec.

In his 3.5 years at UN Women, Yannick has worked together with partners both within and outside the UN to bring innovative ideas, a sharp focus on results and the discipline of delivering on time and on budget.

We have been guided by his expertise in areas such as climate change, renewable energy and disaster risk management, and his focused work to drive UN Women's engagement with innovation, including his masterpiece last Friday when we were able to launch our Gender Innovation Principles at Nasdaq. When they saw the news on this, some people thought that UN Women was listing, and asked us, "what is the share price?" Thank you, Yannick, for that innovation.

As we bid farewell to Yannick, I note that he has promised that he will continue to champion the women's cause, both as a champion for gender equality and also as a feminist.

Yannick's legacy will be marked by the success of UN Women's Flagship Programming Initiatives. These have been instrumental in increasing our earmarked funding to critical priority areas and our strong advocacy for joint UN cooperation.

This is very much in line with the UNDS reforms and indicative of our early drive for the same goals.

Excellencies,

We are working hard to build more gender-friendly societies, with more gender champions and more feminists.

It is now nearly one year since the Secretary-General launched his System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity. Since then, for the first time in UN history, gender parity has been achieved in

the Senior Management Group and amongst Resident Coordinators. Almost all UN entities have implementation plans for accelerating progress towards gender parity. And key policies impacting the representation of women—such as those addressing sexual harassment and staff selection—are under review for enhancement and alignment with the strategy.

Interagency coordination and collaboration around this shared goal is at an all-time high, and UN Women has leveraged its system-wide mandate to lead and coordinate the UN's gender equality efforts.

Let me give you a few examples of these efforts. At UNEP all staff have been engaged in developing a parity plan, which includes the use of temporary special measures in recruitment and downsizing, measures to encourage work/life balance, mentoring and coaching, and programmes to address unconscious bias. UNODC's strategy commits all staff to confronting and challenging gender-based discrimination, harassment and stereotyping, and includes a robust accountability mechanism. UNICEF, WHO, UNAIDS, WFP and UNHCR have augmented their sixteen weeks of maternity leave with an additional eight weeks to reach a total of six months. And UN Women, together with OHRM and the CEB HR Network, will soon launch the Enabling Environment Guidelines, which cover suggested measures for family-friendly policies, flexible working arrangements, talent management, recruitment and standards of conduct.

We celebrate these efforts, recognizing that there is much still to be done to advance progress across the whole UN System, including in the UN field missions.

These critical gender parity measures must be implemented in conjunction with the changes brought by the ongoing UN Reform process. These measures will bring new strength to the system. This recognition must flow also into the broader processes of realignment.

As we continue with the UNDS repositioning, the Common Country Analysis (CCA)/UNDAF is our key operational tool. As the priorities in UN Women's Strategic Notes are aligned to the UNDAF, we are already fully compliant in this area.

Our country-level programmes provide the clear evidence of this.

This afternoon the Board will be briefed on our operational response at country-level in Afghanistan. This will vividly illustrate the ways in which we can mobilize the whole UN Country team around gender equality and women's empowerment, using our coordination role, with a strategy that is rooted in the One UN plan.

Our country office in Afghanistan also works with government, with civil society and with other development partners.

As we continue to adapt to the UN Reform process, we need Member States to strongly assert the importance of our central engagement, alongside ensuring that gender equality and women's empowerment is a shared responsibility.

I will take the floor on this vital topic again tomorrow under item 4 (Preliminary analysis of the financial and other implications of resolution A/RES/72/279 for UN Women).

We increasingly appreciate the importance of coherent and effective approaches and actions across the executive boards.

It is vital that our progress towards reform enhances each other's work. In this regard, we have kept a close and collaborative eye on the UNDP-UNFPA-UNOPS board proceedings.

We know that reaching our goals requires dedicated financing for gender equality and women's empowerment.

In this regard, we are very grateful for your support, which increasingly recognizes our need for both flexibility and sustainability.

For example, I recognize and thank the Swiss Government for its recent commitment for a multi-year core contribution of USD 48 million total for the years 2018-2020.

These contributions from our valued partners are essential to meeting our goals. Without these investments, we cannot play the critical and much-needed role of accelerating and scaling up the delivery on SDGs.

We also need to do better at financing gender equality within the UN itself.

The 2017 SG Report on Repositioning the UN Development System found that only 2.03 per cent of UNDS expenditure is allocated to gender equality and women's empowerment, while only 2.6 per cent of personnel work on this important issue.

To ensure that gender equality is at the heart of UN Reform discussions, UN Women is also co-chairing, with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, a High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality.

The Task-Force is looking at how much the UN is spending on gender equality, how we can increase spending and how we can better track meaningful budgetary allocations and expenditure, while making the case for better investments in UN Women.

I look forward to seeing the results of these efforts by March 2019, and we hope to share the results with the Commission on the Status of Women.

Later in this session, we will also present an update on the results of the report on the Structured Dialogue on Financing, which provides important lessons for moving forward in this area.

We must not get caught up in the positive effects of UN Reform without paying attention also to unintended consequences.

We must ensure that, in consolidating our efforts, we do not relegate gender equality to a side issue and make UN Women's work irrelevant. Instead, we must ensure that we strengthen the contribution of UN Women, so that UN Women does not become a secretariat of the UN system with no direct role to interface with women who have put their trust in us.

Gender equality is a precondition for successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It is both a means and an end. Without gender equality there is no other hope for reaching our imperative to leave no one behind.

We are on a fast-moving journey and we need to shape it so that we reach the right results, sooner rather than later.

Reform must therefore find ways to strengthen, not minimize the role of UN Women.

We have to step it up as UN Women at all levels. We want to do this with you, including by redirecting resources to prioritize leaving no one behind efforts.

Distinguished Delegates,

UN Women has a unique and leading role to play in driving action toward greater and faster accountability for sexual misconduct. One of the priorities in our Strategic Plan is eliminating violence against women and girls.

This means—as we agreed in SDG 5—zero tolerance for violence and harassment, and along with that, support for victims and survivors.

No entity, society or institution is immune to sexual misconduct, not even UN Women. We all have to be 'woke'.

I reiterate my dedication to ensuring that UN Women focuses on support to all survivors of sexual misconduct, including through: the appointment of Purna Sen as UN Women's Executive Coordinator of Sexual Harassment; putting in place HR focal points to implement our [sexual exploitation and abuse](#) (SEA) and [sexual harassment](#) policies; working closely with the UN Victims' Rights Advocate; and taking part in an interagency task force co-chaired by Purna to help improve the UN system's policies and response related to sexual harassment. The work on a reference policy model has been co-chaired by UN Women and the final draft is now with the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) Secretariat. The CEB is the key institution with the responsibility to reinforce zero tolerance and provide strong gender and rights framing

in every context. We support a Victims Rights Charter that is developed in close consultation with victims and whistleblowers.

I call upon Member States to support UN Women's efforts and ensure actions are taken to respond to victims' experiences of all forms of sexual misconduct.

As you know, we have a case of sexual misconduct allegations, which has been a source of pain for months as we await its conclusion.

A few days ago, when we received the investigation report from the Office of Audit and Investigation of UNDP, we took immediate action to initiate a disciplinary process under our policy.

In the coming weeks, once due process is complete, we will share the outcome. It is regrettable that the process takes this long because justice delayed is justice denied.

I will continue to be as transparent as possible as the matter progresses. We ask you to bear with us and not require discussion that could compromise the case as we bring it to a close.

I am deeply committed to seeing that every resource is dedicated to dealing with such cases with speed and sensitivity. Again, your support to help the system tighten up the pace at which it is undertaking its work on these issues will be most appreciated.

The UN Board of Auditors concluded its audit of UN Women's Financial Statements for the year that ended on 31 December 2017 and, I am proud to report they have released an unqualified audit opinion for the 7th year running.

The Board of Audit has confirmed that UN Women's Financial Statements are presented fairly in accordance with International Public-Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) and that UN Women has good liquidity – a 'clean bill of health', so to speak.

Clean audits are especially important for donor confidence and UN Women's resource mobilization efforts.

This unbroken track record is evidence of the concerted efforts made by every office and section to put in place controls that promote operational efficiency, economy and effectiveness in line with our strategic objectives and mandates.

The Board of Audit reported marked improvements, including in the areas of outstanding partner advances, donor reporting, project closure, and compliance in performance management.

I have already introduced Lisa Sutton, who will join us formally on November 1st as Director of the Office of Independent Evaluation and Internal Audit Services and I am sure she will also

make an outstanding contribution.

With her appointment, we have now achieved the final milestone in the establishment of IEAS.

I am confident that we now have a senior and highly qualified team with extensive experience in audit, investigation, evaluation and other oversight work within the UN system who will establish the new office, recruit all audit staff and implement the 2018 annual audit plan. They have led and directed the audit engagements and initiated best practices in our oversight systems and mechanisms.

Turning now to cost-recovery. Following the Executive Board decision 2017/2 endorsing the harmonized cost recovery policy, UN-Women along with UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF, has submitted a report presenting two evidence-based proposals for the recovery of indirect costs.

These proposals may be considered in the context of several strategic issues, including the outcome of implementation of resolution 72/279, which may affect the harmonized cost-recovery methodology and rates in the future.

We are proceeding with the implementation of the current Strategic Plan, at the same time looking forward to the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, on which we expect to circulate a guidance note to Member States in mid-September.

The guidance has been developed by UN Women, together with the five UN regional commissions following the adoption of ECOSOC resolution 2018/9 of 12 June 2018 and in preparation for the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women,

This will support States and other stakeholders in conducting comprehensive national-level reviews of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly.

We are living in a different world from that of 2015, when we commemorated the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration.

Women all over the world want the 25th anniversary to be much more meaningful, to help us take an honest look at the status of women and girls of the world, and to address the gaps that remain.

Today, the divides are sharper, but the hunger for gender equality and women's empowerment has never been so great. Much more is expected from us all, come 2020.

Again, I plead for accelerated and scaled up interventions as we implement the SDGs.

This is especially true for those who suffer multiple forms of discrimination, including: LGBTI people, women and girls living with disabilities, young girls in poor communities, women and girls in indigenous communities, and refugees and migrants.

We want Beijing+25 to be more than just a review of where we stand. We want a moment of political mobilization for countries to take stock in a participatory manner on the progress made and, even more importantly, on how to close the critical gaps that remain.

As we look at those gaps, we cannot underestimate the strong forces at play internationally that are generating not unity but division, and that threaten to accelerate the shrinking of space for civil society.

We want your support for renewed and accelerated action: strengthened accountability for the implementation of commitments; revitalized public debate, social mobilization and awareness-raising to transform social norms and end stereotypes that hinder gender equality; unqualified support to a strengthened feminist movement that galvanizes the next generation of gender equality advocates, who must be both women and men.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage Member States to start preparations early, in a collaborative manner with all stakeholders in your own countries and internationally, including engaging with civil society and supporting multi-stakeholder consultations.

And to allocate resources to UN Women in order to ensure that we are able to provide steady and meaningful resources toward this process.

UN Women stands ready to support you in this endeavour. 2020 is a crucial milestone on our journey to 2030.

In closing, we thank you for your support and advice, as we continue to move into a new era in the UN System. It is exciting, it has challenges, but we feel that together we can overcome these challenges and take the work of gender equality forward.

Thank you.