

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT “UN-WOMEN AT 10 YEARS”

Side event of the second regular session 2020 of the Executive Board

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Thanks to Ambassador Jukka for his fantastic leadership over the UN Women Board.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Dear Friends,

I am honored to be here today to mark the 10th anniversary of the creation of UN Women.

And I am pleased to see today some of the women who have directly shaped UN Women from the outset and helped take it to where it is today. A special greeting to my sisters Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and Michelle Bachelet.

Distinguished Delegates and Civil Society Partners,

My sincere congratulations to all.

Within the United Nations family, UN Women has established itself as a strong voice for women’s rights, advancing, , educating and pushing all parts of the system to mainstream gender in all our work .

UN Women’s landmark achievements at the global, national, and local level are many.

But let me highlight a few that stand out. In its short history, UN Women has helped move the needle by:

- supporting more than 175 successful legal reforms and 25 constitutional reforms to strengthen women’s rights, including property, land, and protection from discrimination and violence.
- Strengthening access to essential services, including health and legal services, for survivors of violence against women in nearly 60 countries.
- deploying 130 experts to investigate conflict-related sexual violence, including secondments to every single UN commission of inquiry since 2010, national courts, and the International Criminal Court. This has resulted in some of the ‘firsts’ in prosecution of gender-related crimes under international law.

- Supporting women's meaningful participation in peace processes in Colombia, Syria and Yemen and several other countries.
- And building the relationships and platform for women's civil society to engage in the work of the Organization.

Over the years, I worked closely with UN Women in the trenches fighting for gender equality.

I also worked closely with UN Women on the post-2015 development agenda, the precursor to the Sustainable Development Goals.

I have seen it firsthand: UN Women's work with Member States, other UN agencies and programmes, and civil society played an important part in formulating SDG5, our dedicated goal for gender equality.

I refer to SDG5 as the docking station of all the goals, because we know that realizing gender equality and women's rights holds the greatest potential to eliminate poverty and hunger, achieve quality education for everyone and achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

This is even more important as we face the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

The social and economic impact of this crisis is falling disproportionately on women and girls everywhere.

It is clear than rampant inequalities, including gender inequality, made our communities and societies more vulnerable to the pandemic in the first place.

In developed countries, figures are already emerging showing that women are more likely to have lost their jobs and less likely to be hired for new ones since the pandemic. That doesn't include the informal sector where women are invisible or in the home where their unpaid work is undervalued

In developing countries, girls who are out of school may never return, stunting their life chances and impeding the development of their communities and societies.

And we are seeing everywhere, a horrific increase in the levels of violence against women and girls in all forms, from child marriage to domestic abuse to online harassment. This was the impetus for the Secretary-General's global appeal in April for peace in the home – an end to all violence everywhere and an appeal for solidarity in the face of this pandemic. It is an appeal that we must all get behind. Because the reality is, unless we act now, the pandemic could set women's rights back by decades.

At the same time, there is a pinprick of light in what have been difficult months. The pandemic is demonstrating the value of women's leadership. Women leaders everywhere are showing that bold leadership, inclusion, diversity and equality bring benefits for all.

These phenomena – women's inequality, and the benefits of women's leadership across the board – are two sides of the same coin, and I thank UN Women for making that clear to all.

They have worked relentlessly to join the dots, bringing out the connections between different parts of the women's rights agenda, and demonstrating unequivocally that equal rights are not only a moral imperative, but essential for the wellbeing of all on a healthy planet.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My remit for these remarks was to look ahead. In the middle of a global pandemic, looking ahead is even more difficult than usual – but perhaps even more important.

We need to start work now so that women's rights are front and centre of the recovery, to launch us into this essential Decade of Action on the SDGs.

Gender equality is a transformative agenda for peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. That is why the Secretary-General has made it one of his top three priorities.

Piecemeal, ad hoc efforts are not enough; we need results at scale. The Decade of Action requires structural transformation, through a whole-of-UN and whole-of-government approach to gender equality.

This puts the onus on everyone to act: Member States, the UN system as a whole, and civil society – leveraging the unique leadership and expertise of UN Women.

This is exactly the model that we have followed in developing the Spotlight Initiative – an effort that brings the system together with their respective capacities and mandates to deliver on our shared responsibility to end all violence against women and girls, in support of national governments, and with civil society at the heart in an equal partnership.

There is not one corner of the UN's work that can afford to ignore gender issues and women's rights.

We are counting on UN Women to continue providing the technical leadership and coordination to take equality and inclusivity everywhere, from peacekeeping missions to outer space; from agricultural research to cyberspace.

We are counting on you to continue your essential work behind the scenes: providing expertise, supporting intergovernmental processes, setting international norms and standards, monitoring and accountability.

And we are counting on you to continue rallying the entire UN system, Member States, civil society and more, in support of a recovery to societies that are resilient, inclusive, gender equal, and climate just, where women and girls are at the centre of decision-making.

The Decade of Action challenges all of us to do just that. And the leap forward on the Decade will be fueled by the mobilization of Generation Equality and the six Action Coalitions.

These Coalitions are leading the way and mobilizing new constituencies for transformation, including to end gender-based violence, secure sustainable peace and security, and further

climate justice. And I am pleased to see the focused attention to youth leadership across the Action Coalitions. It is young people, and young women in particular, who are at the forefront of movements advocating for change – for more equal, inclusive, resilient, sustainable, and climate just societies. We can achieve incredible change by supporting their mobilization and activism.

The reforms of the UN development system offer a unique opportunity to take our work to the next level and leverage our new resident coordinator system to amplify UN Women's work and mandate.

A product of reform itself, UN Women is uniquely positioned to lead the way.

I thank Member States, civil society and all stakeholders for their continued strong support to UN Women – together we have helped improve the lives of women and girls across the globe.

But we can and must do more for transformative change.

I look forward to the next 10 years.

Thank you.