

Opening statement to the Executive Board, Second Regular Session 2021

**By Pramila Patten, Under-Secretary-General, Acting Executive Director of UN Women
and Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict**

Excellencies, distinguished Delegates, guests and colleagues,

I am delighted to welcome you to the Second Regular Session of the UN Women Executive Board 2021. I regret that I am not able to join you until tomorrow's meeting, but my Deputy Executive Directors, Åsa Regnér and Anita Bhatia and the UN Women technical experts are on hand to respond to your questions on our agenda today.

Please allow me to begin by congratulating **His Excellency Ambassador Alhaji Fanday Turay, the incoming Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations and the incoming President of the Executive Board**, for his election. I thank the delegation of Sierra Leone, and in particular Ambassador Victoria Sulimani for being the Acting President in the interim period, for her unwavering commitment to UN Women through this year. My warm thanks also go to the **Members of the Bureau** for their committed work as regional representatives, for their work in chairing the Board's many meetings and informal briefings, for supporting the Board in their decision-making, and for helping us to arrive at consensus every time.

Excellencies, our work together has never been more crucial or more urgent. The devastating crises in **Afghanistan, Haiti**, and so many other countries around the world, are having a direct impact on the rights and freedoms of women and girls. They show us the fragility of the gains made and how quickly progress can be reversed.

We are seeing in high definition the spectrum of alignment with UN Women's mandate, from the unprecedented results of the Generation Equality Forum at one end of the scale, to the Taliban's actions on the other. All the way across those differing world views, UN Women has a vital role to play.

Just as this organization has so successfully been able to demonstrate and bring to global attention issues like domestic violence and the burden of caregiving on women and girls during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we are reminded now through the testimonies of women in Afghanistan of what extreme misogyny looks like in action. The vital importance of UN Women's mandate has never been so clearly demonstrated as in these last months and years.

I am proud to be at the helm of UN Women as Acting Executive Director at this testing time. I hope that you too are proud of our decision to **stay and deliver** in Afghanistan, our call for the **inclusion of women** in the governance structure of the new leadership in Afghanistan, and our determined work with our partners **to continue providing life-saving services** to Afghan women and girls. It is urgent now to preserve and protect women's participation in public life including

in **humanitarian aid provision** so that Afghan women can **continue to have access** to sexual, reproductive and maternal health, nutrition, education and protection services.

Our strong and unwavering response to these gendered crises must set the bar for the global community on the need for women's and girls' rights to be a **central and non-negotiable component of peace, recovery and sustainable development**. We count on your continuing support to enable us to do so across the multiple other countries where our teams are also operating in challenging environments, from Haiti to Mali, from Myanmar to Somalia, from Syria to Venezuela.

These crises come as the **COVID-19 pandemic**, fueled by the Delta variant, continues to spread around the world. We stand in solidarity with the countries who are struggling with new and continuing waves of infection.

We continue to urge for **accessible vaccines** in all countries and for **fiscal response packages and government stimulus packages** to support women affected by the pandemic's economic and social fallout. We need laws and policy reforms to address the **care crisis** and to tackle girls' education and access to technology.

The UNDP/UN Women **Global COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker** has provided critical insights on what governments have done to support women and mitigate the pandemic's negative impacts and in October we will be releasing new data. Ahead of the upcoming General Assembly, UN Women will also be launching a **Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice**, designed to influence policy debates on how to shape a more equal and sustainable post-COVID world. I look forward to sharing these products with you in the coming weeks and months.

As we address the socio-economic aspects of the crisis, we must continue our focus on the shadow pandemic of **violence against women and girls**, which includes an increase in **conflict-related sexual violence** affecting the functioning of protection mechanisms, and particularly of women-led service providers. In my role as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, I have seen the ways in which the pandemic has further hampered our ability to monitor these crimes and ensure access to justice for victims/survivors.

This is the global context in which UN Women's new **Strategic Plan for 2022 – 2025** will play its part. It is an ambitious and visionary Plan that represents and incorporates the feedback received from all Member States. It has been developed **through an unprecedented number of formal and informal consultations** and an exhaustive analysis of the economic, political, social and demographic trends that will impact gender equality over the next 5-10 years. We believe that it is reflective of UN Women's vision, mandate and the change we seek to drive in the lives of women and girls. We are closely aligned with our sister agencies in process and position, and I hope that we may look forward to your endorsement of this Plan and its integrated budget proposal. I sincerely appreciate the active engagement of the Bureau and the entire Membership throughout

this process, and your guidance and support for our vision to achieve impact at scale and deliver measurable and lasting development results.

In terms of revenue, we look back on a strong year in 2020 where we set new records for both regular and other resources, with **15 of our top 20 donors increasing their contributions and the largest growth in regular resources of any of the New York-based UN entities.** We are very grateful to our donors for showing this level of trust and support, which is bolstered by our **10th consecutive unqualified audit opinion** on our Financial Statements.

I thank you once again for your guidance along this journey, and for your leadership in the important work that lies ahead of us.

We know how much we can achieve by working together in solidarity and partnership towards a common goal. We trust that we will continue in this vein as we move forward with our Strategic Plan, so that we can deliver on the promise of the SDGs to achieve gender equality and a better world for the women and girls of the world. Thank you.