

***Opening Remarks to the UN-Women Executive Board First Regular Session 2019 by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director***  
*12 February 2019*

[As delivered]

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

I would like to begin with expressing my gratitude to the 2018 Bureau for their fine work. I thank in particular our former Board President, Her Excellency Ms. Ivana Pajević of Montenegro, as well as the Vice Presidents from Zambia, the Republic of Korea, Panama and Finland, who supported her so ably. Thank you for an effective, productive year and for your strong commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and for your unwavering support of UN Women. We look forward to your continued advocacy for gender equality at the Commission on the Status of Women and in other intergovernmental bodies, as well as in your regions and countries.

Let me now welcome this year's Bureau. At its helm is Her Excellency Ms. Pernelle Beckles of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago – thank you for leading us this year. I warmly welcome the Vice Presidents: from Hungary, Mrs. Katalin Bogyay, from Republic of Yemen, Mr. Marwan Ali Noman Al-Dobhany, from Australia, Ms. Natalie Cohen and from Kenya, Ms. Koki Muli Grignon, who is our facilitator for the agreed conclusions this year. We look forward to working with you all, and I thank you for the commitment that you have already demonstrated in the few weeks you have been in office.

2018 has been a year of profound change for the UN system. UN Women has been fully engaged in ongoing reforms, especially the repositioning of the UN development system. The objective of our engagement is two-fold: Firstly, to ensure that the reforms strengthen the UN system's coherence in supporting gender equality and women's empowerment. Secondly, to ensure that UN Women can fully use its coordination mandate for enhanced delivery by the UN system to transform the lives of women and girls everywhere.

At the same time, throughout 2018, we have been making the necessary adjustments in order for us to be well prepared for the new developments within the UN. We focused on several areas. They include: enhancing our ability to contribute to the work of UN country teams and ensuring that all UNDAFs have a strong focus on gender equality and women's empowerment; supporting a Resident Coordinators system that is gender responsive; and giving inputs into system-wide guiding processes, so that they take gender equality considerations into account.

The changes in the UN development system also require UN Women to adapt and change from within. I have initiated a change management process to prioritize better, and to strengthen our institution, while aligning with UN reforms. I have asked Patricia Francis, former Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the International Trade Center, and former

member of our Audit Advisory Committee, to support me in this task as Special Advisor on Change Management. Patricia is leading our efforts to enhance our impact, ensuring that we take advantage of our experience after nearly 10 years of operations. We have been drawing from these lessons to guide the changes.

We have just received the MOPAN evaluation report. These are our external partners, who in their report have highlighted our strengths and weaknesses. I was pleased to see a strong recognition of our clear strategic vision, our efforts to decentralize, and the progress we have made since 2014.

The report also pointed out challenges related to our limited capacity in some countries, and it further indicated a need for better alignment between resources and priorities. These challenges will be addressed by our change management process, which aims to achieve the following objectives: a stronger focus on results; better alignment between the budget and planning process to enable us to prioritize, monitor progress and improve value for money; updated processes to ensure more effective and efficient decision-making with less self-imposed red tape; greater integration of our normative, standards-setting and policy work into our programming; capacity to absorb resources, deliver on time and on budget; and accountability to the beneficiaries.

We have already made some headway with the new division of labour between the Deputy Executive Directors, the finalization of the restructuring of some divisions to remove duplications and silos, and an analysis of our regional and country presence against resources available and potential impact. Many of the proposed adjustments will be part of our new Integrated Budget, which we will submit in draft format in June.

Our intention is to increase efficiency, prioritize and consolidate our work by making systemic change, and change that will last, and enabling women to realize their rights and change their lives. We also want to be a catalyst for change and an enabler of implementation by others to achieve gender equality in a manner that diversifies partners for change, within and beyond the UN. We want to focus on new, selected interventions that we can scale up and replicate within and across countries. We also want to focus on results that we can measure quantitatively and qualitatively so that we can clearly report to you what contribution can be truly attributed to UN Women. We are learning to give up work that we cannot fund—that is very difficult, but we are learning. We are making sure that there are meaningful benefits from investments we made. Also, we are projecting even better the voices and agency of beneficiaries in our communications, and ensuring that our work is rights-based and intersectional. These changes will be essential to strengthen UN Women as we approach our tenth anniversary in 2020 and enter UN Women's second decade.

All of this must ensure our alignment with the objectives of the UN Reform, our Strategic Plan, the 2030 Agenda and the unfinished business of the Beijing Platform for Action.

2020 will be the year of several important milestones: the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; five years of implementing the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals; 20 years of Security Council resolution 1325; and, as I mentioned, 10 years of UN Women. These anniversaries provide us with an unmissable opportunity to evaluate the progress we have made and the progress women in the world have made, to create unprecedented political momentum and social mobilization in support of gender equality, and to build on the mobilization effects at this moment of #TimesIsNow and the era of #MeToo and similar movements.

In the context of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, we have called upon all Member States to undertake participatory national reviews of the progress and challenges for women in the last 25 years in each country. I would like to appeal to you to help us, by following up in all your countries and ensuring that comprehensive national reviews are being undertaken. Our own UN Women offices are also assisting and following up in all the countries that we are located in, and beyond. The regional commissions will undertake regional reviews in the later part of the year. These will feed into the 2020 session of the Commission on the Status of Women, followed by a High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly in September 2020.

We are also working with partners to convene a civil society-led Global Forum for Gender Equality in June 2020. This Forum should be the illustration of an expanded and deepened gender equality movement that has grown in the last 25 years, with women at the core, and with the engagement of broader civil society, Member States, men and boys, gender non-conforming people, the private sector, the disability movement, media and youth. All these will help us identify the key actions that must be undertaken to achieve irreversible progress for women and girls ahead of the end of SDG implementation.

Out of the 25<sup>th</sup> Beijing anniversary we must emerge with a stronger road map to achieve substantive equality by 2030. This roadmap should build on the many normative gains of the last few years. This will include, I hope, a set of strong agreed conclusions from previous Commissions as well as the upcoming Commission on the Status of Women in March. For the first time, the Commission will examine the topic of social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Progress in these areas is critical for women's empowerment and to leave no woman or girl behind, and for that matter, leave no man or boy behind.

Proper investment in these areas holds the potential to break the stubborn barriers, which include addressing unpaid care and domestic work, enabling the mobility of women and girls, both literally and in socio-economic terms, supporting the realization of their sexual and reproductive health and rights, enhancing their access to economic opportunities, and strengthening their resilience to shocks.

This is especially true for the 740 million women in the informal sector, who often lack social protection, including pension, maternity leave or health care coverage. They face discrimination

in accessing public services and often lack access to adequate infrastructure to support their productive activities. This is of special importance to women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination: older women, young women, women with disabilities, indigenous women and others.

Tomorrow, we will present our strategy on Equality in the Law which seeks to fast-track the repeal of discriminatory laws in 100 countries by 2023. I am proud of the work that UN Women is doing to eliminate discriminatory laws. This is at the core of our mandate. When fully implemented, the strategy can impact more than 50 million women and girls at the cost of only 16 cents per woman per year. Just 16 cents per woman per year can change the lives of millions of women.

Financing is critical. There should be no cut back in social protection and public services, especially when austerity measures are in place. Investments should promote women's well-being, livelihoods and productivity, including in non-traditional sectors. Work should improve physical infrastructure, including school buildings with safe sanitation facilities for girls, which can help enable equal access to education -- a public service. I count on your support to ensure a successful outcome next month.

Distinguished delegates, I also look forward to another critical milestone this year. This will be the publication of our *Progress of the World's Women* report in May. The report this time will examine "Families in a Changing World" -- a topic that we hope will provide significant new inputs into policy discussions at national, regional and global levels.

As we near the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, we are reminded of the UN's overdue commitment to reach gender parity by the year 2000. UN Women continues to actively support the implementation of the Secretary-General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity. We are proud to have led the development of the "Enabling Environment Guidelines". I look forward to sharing with you in more detail the guidelines and our other efforts to advance gender parity in the UN during the informal briefing on this topic tomorrow.

Addressing parity and workplace culture is not only about gender balance -- it is also about ensuring an inclusive and supportive work culture for all, free of abuse of authority, and I take this seriously.

We have faced a situation that has negatively impacted the work relations and environment in UN Women. I have been actively dealing with this, together with our Human Resources team who are serving our staff with dedication, as well as with the support of my ASG Asa Regner. We have followed up all complaints, reaching out to all personnel, and meeting with the staff council to ensure that every situation is handled in the best way.

I take all complaints of possible misconduct very seriously. The wellbeing of my staff is important to all of us, and so is due process. I can assure you that I will stay focused on this, and that I am working very closely with my team.

I have made sure that all complaints are acted upon and will continue to do so. I am having ongoing discussions, not only with my HR team, but with the whole Management Team, on the diverse issues to ensure coherent relations in the workplace. These include performance management with 360-degree assessments, coaching and teambuilding, and reassigning of managers where needed.

Where there are allegations of misconduct, they are referred to OIOS. Furthermore, I have asked the internal audit service to conduct an advisory assignment on ethics and integrity as part of its 2019 workplan.

We have also taken steps to better support our younger colleagues. I very much appreciate their important contributions and their leadership. Together with the UN Women “youth council” we have been working to address the conditions of service of our interns.

Tomorrow there will also be an informal briefing on UN Women’s actions to prevent and address sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. It will consider, among other things, the UN’s recent "Safe Space: Survey on Sexual Harassment in our Workplace". This gave all personnel an opportunity to be heard in connection with sexual harassment in the UN. I would like to point out the helpful material provided on this topic of sexual harassment: “Towards an end to sexual harassment: the urgency and nature of change in the era of #MeToo”.

On resource mobilization, our favourite topic, distinguished delegates, I want to thank you for your support to UN Women this past year. I am pleased to report that the preliminary estimate of our 2018 income has grown to a new record, to reach about US\$390 million– this is \$20 million more than 2017. We need more. In 2019, and with your help, ten years later, UN Women has to continue to focus on reaching our target of \$440 million, to become fully funded and deliver on our Strategic Plan.

On the positive side in 2019, UN Women has received \$22 million of other resources from the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative for Latin America and Africa. We need still more donors to come forward and invest in our work, particularly in core resources. The growing gap between core and non-core resources limits our potential for impact.

We are also making an effort to leverage systemwide processes to enhance our funding. We have contributed to the Funding Compact. As a co-chair of the High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality we are leading efforts to generate sustainable investments for gender equality for the entire UN system, as well as addressing barriers that limit resource mobilization for the UN system, and especially for UN Women.

As one of four UN agencies on the Secretary-General’s Global Task Force on Digital Financing of the Sustainable Development Goals, we advocate for financial inclusion, which includes addressing the needs of institutions that serve women, such as ourselves.

We will respond to the calls that you have made to diversify our sources of funding. We have already enhanced our capacity for mobilizing individual giving and are looking at barriers to mobilizing diverse core resources through innovative funding.

We continue to look for investments to put us on a much better footing as we prepare for the next decade of our work. Our first ten years has built a solid institution - noting thanks to Michele Bachelet - with a team that is committed, able to deliver on our mandate, and to leverage key partners, in order to take on the critical remaining barriers to gender equality together.

We have mobilized partners for gender equality far and wide. We ask you to join us and the world to mark International Women's Day on March 8<sup>th</sup> here at UN Headquarters. Last year, on International Women's Day, UN Women was mentioned in about 5,000 news articles in 90 countries and in 400 expert commentaries. Together we can make the voices of women and girls vibrate everywhere because together we have built a solid foundation and we are an institution that can provide the expertise needed around the world.

Excellencies, from where we stand, the job of leading to substantive equality can be done -- with greater capacity at UN Women, with financial security, and an enabling work environment in all our offices, from Headquarters to field, and for all our staff, from our most junior to our most senior employees - who are the most dedicated people to gender equality I have ever met.

Our work in 2019 has to be a solid building block for ending our first ten years as a strong organization, ready for the big steps of completing SDG implementation and the unfinished business of the Beijing Platform for Action. We need the strong support of Member States to ensure that this journey is one of positive disruption for every girl, every woman, no matter who they are and no matter where they live.

Thank you.