

**Closing Remarks by Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women, Sima Bahous, at the Annual Session of the UN-Women Executive Board**

22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022

[As delivered]

Distinguished delegates, I would like to thank the President of the Executive Board, H.E. Ambassador Fatima Rabab – my good friend, your good friend – for leading us through the annual session so effectively. And we look forward, like we said earlier in the opening, to continuing to work with her in her new capacity as our best ally for gender equality within the system. So, thank you.

I would also like to thank the Vice-Presidents, and all those who have contributed to the robust discussion of this session's significant agenda. I appreciate very much the collaborative and constructive spirit in which we are able to approach all topics. Congratulations on the adoption of the robust decisions that will guide our work.

Your engagement, distinguished delegates, in setting these joint directions signals the deep value of the multilateral process and our ability to chart a unified path for the future of UN-Women. I leave the meeting today with renewed energy for the months and the years ahead.

In that regard, I also thank the delegations for their wide ranging and perceptive remarks over the past two days.

Among the long-standing supporters of UN Women within this Board, and within your ranks of delegates, allow me to recognize in particular Mr. Markus Reisle, who returns to Bern as Chief of Staff at the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation. We have deeply appreciated your skillful support during negotiations and wish you well in your new role.

Excellencies, at this session we have presented the results of the 2018-2021 period and looked ahead to the areas of focus under the new Strategic Plan. I greatly valued your guidance and feedback on this.

I would like to reiterate my remarks on our institutional strengthening efforts to enhance the transparency, accountability and fiduciary strength of the organization. I would also like to be clear that we have heard the valuable feedback from our Independent Audit and Evaluation Service and our Audit Advisory Committee. Allow me to assure you of my personal commitment that we will take action as promised.

In my opening statement, I undertook to establish a dedicated ethics function within UN Women. Thank you for your positive response. This confirms to me that this is the right decision. I will take action to strengthen our capacity in this area. I will ensure the highest standards of conduct in our organization, including protection of whistleblowers, and report regularly on this to the Board from 2023. The Board's formal decision on this subject is also welcome.

I share the Board's views on your crucial oversight role. We will reflect carefully with you on how to make this role more effective, in addition to other aspects of internal controls of our organizational effectiveness and efficiency, such as robust anti-fraud mechanisms and strengthened audit and evaluation functions.

You have placed your trust in us, and we are committed to continuing to deserve it. I am grateful for your positive comments in regard to our success in mobilizing non-core resources, growing our regular resources and maintaining a 30 per cent core to non-core ratio. We will continue to diversify and broaden our donor base, strengthening our strategic partnerships with International Financial Institutions and the work around innovative financing such as gender bonds. We will also pursue the success of multi-stakeholder partnerships in support of gender equality and women's empowerment such as Generation Equality, noting at the same time our shared regard for national ownership to ensure sensitivity to local contexts.

Excellencies, it is that strong relationship between country objectives and programme implementation that we saw reflected in the results of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021. Your acknowledgement of the work that has been done to put in place gender-responsive laws, policies, and strategies at country level is especially important in the context of recovery, amidst the current political and economic turmoil.

However, as we have noted, we are still too far from achieving our shared Sustainable Development Goals. I am pleased that the COVID-19 Policy Tracker has been useful to highlight the gaps and identify priorities. Among those gaps, social protection and care work are important for the revival of women's participation in the labour force, including in the digital sector.

We are grateful for your recognition of the significant role played by UN-Women, including through the UN Trust Fund on Violence Against Women and Girls, in responding to the intensification of violence against women and girls. I noted the emphasis in particular on virtual spaces and in crisis settings such as in Afghanistan and Ukraine. We share the deep concern expressed by you about reaching the most vulnerable populations in these contexts, including those at the "crossroads" of multiple forms of discrimination.

Distinguished delegates, as we look ahead to the implementation of the new Strategic Plan in the increasingly challenging global context, we will continue to focus on core areas of our work. These include ensuring that women participate meaningfully in peace and security, as well as in humanitarian and climate action. As some of you noted, our UN system coordination role is vital in this regard, to amplify the work to support women and girls and make progress towards the achievement of SDG 5 and Agenda 2030 more broadly. I took good note of the several requests for stronger engagement in areas such as climate change, education and the use of digital technology – both in terms of emerging opportunities, and threats.

We appreciated the recognition of UN-Women as a "catalyst of systematic change within the UN System". We take very seriously our role in driving UN reforms, ensuring gender mainstreaming and accountability for gender equality and women's empowerment across the UN system and assure you all of our continued commitment to do so.

I thank the Board for their continued support to the work and the mandate of UN Women.

I also thank the Secretary of the Executive Board, Jean-Luc Bories, and the entire team of the Executive Board secretariat. Once again, they have ensured that the proceedings of the Board are seamless and well-coordinated, leading to the positive outcome of this session, including the four decisions.

Also, I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to my Deputies, Asa and Anita, and all my team who worked hard towards the positive decisions we have seen today.

Distinguished delegates, to conclude, this has been my first Annual Session. I have found it informative, but more importantly inspiring, and also very satisfying in terms of the clarity with which we have addressed key issues with a shared focus on action. And we will act.

I will continue to depend on you all to support us. I ask those who can, to maintain or even increase funding support. I ask all of you to be champions for gender equality, alongside us, within the UN, in all multilateral spaces and in your own countries. And I very much look forward to our ongoing work together.

I thank you.