

Closing remarks by Ms. Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women at the Executive Board
First Regular Session 2023

Tuesday, 14 February 2023

[As delivered]

Let me first thank H.E. Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya, the President of our Board, for his effective and attentive leadership of the First Regular Session of 2023. We have finished our work promptly and efficiently. This is a very good way to start our year. Thank you.

I also thank the Vice-Presidents for their leadership and effective coordination within their regional groups. I understand that these have gone very smoothly and I recognize the facilitation of the negotiations by the Permanent Mission of Italy and their strategic guidance. Thank you Italy. This has led to the valuable and substantive decisions that you have adopted, which we will take forward.

Allow me to also recognize our able Secretary of the Executive Board, Jean-Luc Bories, and to thank his highly efficient team for organizing once again a flawless Executive Board session.

I also would like to thank our efficient team of UN Women – all of you, my UN Women colleagues who are in New York and in the field. You have contributed to the session documents, to the briefings, to the updates and I thank you all very much for that. Our workforce is our strongest asset and will always remain so. Thank you very much for that.

Excellencies, through its decision 2023/2, the UN Women Executive Board is the first among its peers to endorse a move forward on the Joint Assessment on Oversight and Governance. I would expect nothing less. It reflects the emphasis we placed together on these areas and leading by example on the reform agenda. It is in line with my priority to be at the heart of the UN System that UN Women has been an enthusiastic ‘early adopter’ of this aspect of UN reform. It also aligns with the focus I will continue to place on transparency. As I said yesterday, transparency drives accountability and accountability drives results.

You have reiterated your confidence in UN Women and for that we are grateful. You have also raised questions and areas that you want us to prioritize. We have listened carefully and be assured that we will respond diligently.

I particularly appreciate your reactions to our work in Afghanistan. I know you that you understand how challenging this has been. We will continue to amplify the voices of Afghan women and of Afghan women human rights defenders and peacebuilders. We will push for concerted and collective action from the international community, including the OIC. In a world of multiple crises we will step up wherever we are needed, be it in Ethiopia, Ukraine, or in Colombia or anywhere else in the world.

The situation of women and girls in crises makes demands on our mandate that are daunting, but together we are rising to them. You heard the report from the Asia and Pacific Region. The cross-cutting themes described for our future work there are relevant across the world: raising the voices of women and enabling their leadership; fostering enduring social norms change, especially as it impacts the acceleration of ending violence against women and girls, and engaging and promoting young people's leadership.

To be clear, an emphasis on country-level results is not about de-capacitating our headquarters. It is about aligning the capacities of the organization, from my office, to headquarters, to the Regional Offices and in the field, in the service of change on the ground where women and girls live. The litmus test of our impact must be positive change for them.

I extend my deep thanks to those who, like Ireland, Italy, Germany, and Japan, have committed to increasing financial resources for UN Women.

Many of you remarked on our 11th consecutive unqualified audit opinion. We are proud but we are not complacent. Similarly, we take your appreciation of the high rate and timely implementation of audit recommendations as a challenge to maintain and improve, not to be satisfied.

I appreciated your interest in our work with International Financial Institutions. We hear your call for a harmonized approach within the UN System and look forward to sharing the results of this with you going forward.

I am encouraged by the robust discussions that remain a hallmark of our work. We need this clarity and frankness, particularly in discussions on difficult topics like Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment. You have my commitment to be bold and decisive in confronting incidents when they occur and to take the necessary action working towards measurable and well-operationalized frameworks to monitor and guide UN Women's response.

In the same spirit, my strong commitment to increasing diversity and tackling discrimination including race-based discrimination is integrated into our Strategic Plan and I am happy to be judged by how well we deliver on that.

At the coming in-person session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) we will address 'Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls'. This will be echoed in our commemoration of International Women's Day.

As you have noted, the global context is getting no easier for women and girls. In many countries their situation is getting worse. It is our task to jointly find ways to reverse the decline and accelerate progress. Science, technology, and innovation offer precisely that. Strong CSW Agreed Conclusions will provide an essential basis for closing gaps in access to vital technologies and fostering the innovation that women and girls can bring.

I thank you all for making this such an engaging and substantive session. I look forward to seeing you again in June 2023 for our Annual session.

I thank you very much.