

## **UN Women Executive Board, First Regular Session 2024, 12-13 February**

### **Closing remarks by Ms Sima Bahous, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women**

13 February 2024

*[As delivered]*

I would first like to extend my deepest appreciation to H.E. Ambassador Markova, the President of our Board, for her attentive and effective leadership of the First Regular Session of 2024. Thank you, your Excellency.

I also thank our Vice-Presidents for their leadership and effective coordination within the regional groups. Thank you dear Ambassador Hikmat, Ambassador Yapi Bah, Ambassador Andreas, and Ambassador Joanna. I look forward to our continuing close collaboration this year. Thank you.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the Minister of Women, Family, and Children from Côte d'Ivoire, Madame Nassénéba Touré, who was present here today, and I thank her for her presence today and yesterday and her active participation in this session. Thank you also to Ambassador Halley for expertly chairing this morning's session.

I recognize the facilitation of the negotiations by the Permanent Mission of Sweden and their strategic guidance. Thank you, Sweden. This has led to the valuable and substantive decision on audit that you have adopted, which we will certainly take forward. Thank you.

My thanks also to the UN Board of Auditors and the Staff Council for their continued support and positive collaboration. Thank you.

To the UN Women team, our two deputies for their very first board, Nyaradzayi and Kirsi, the Secretary of the Executive Board, Jean-Luc Bories, and his team, all our policy experts, directors, specialists, UN Women colleagues, and my own team in the Executive Office, thank you very much for your contributions to make this Board session flawless.

Finally, an emphatic thank you to all of you, Delegates, who braved the first New York Winter storm of 2024 to be here today. Your efforts were instrumental to our extremely constructive dialogue today and yesterday.

2024 started as 2023 ended; compounding crises, a planet on fire, and a continued assault on women's rights in many countries. 2030 is just a few years away, yet no country has achieved gender equality. We here, at this Board, understand the urgency this implies, the imperative of redoubling our efforts.

At the same time, we also understand the opportunities before us to do exactly that.

The first presents itself next month at the Commission on the Status of Women. There, you will address the regional financial architecture, financing and poverty. We must firmly place women's rights on that international financial agenda. I look forward to working with you all to that end.

We also look ahead to the General Assembly and to the Summit of the Future and after that, Beijing+30. I heard and appreciated your focus on that and was encouraged by your bold commitments in your remarks to this Board, and I look forward to the journey ahead together.

This morning you heard about our work in Africa: a region with the youngest population in the world. Be assured of my commitment to continued investment in our country and regional offices and remaining close to the people we serve. We will do so at the heart of the UN system, carrying out the coordination role you gave us, influencing, supporting, and aligning with the work of our sister agencies. And I stress again the indispensable partnership with young people and civil society as we do so, always.

We shared our twelfth consecutive unqualified audit opinion on our Financial Statements for the year ending December 31, 2022. This is our third year in a row with no long-outstanding recommendations from the UN Board of Auditors. We take pride in this and we will continue to strive to achieve operational improvement and ultimately, excellence.

Finally, you heard about our communications and advocacy work, another area I will continue to ensure investment in. I share with you all a belief in the centrality of our communications and advocacy work. Thank you for your positive comments on our work.

We remain committed to strengthening, particularly regarding communications capacity for the field, including to ensure localized communications and advocacy approaches; demonstrating impact of communications and advocacy efforts at all levels; and taking fullest advantage of coherence to maximize our impact with limited resources. And, as I told you yesterday, we commit to telling the story of our successes much better than we do, because you heard from us today and yesterday and throughout of the many successes that we have achieved for women and girls. I know that we still have a long way to go, but highlighting the successes and the positives is always very important to keep us focused and to keep us moving forward.

As we close, I thank all of you for your continued support and confidence in us. Our Board is not only a place where we come for guidance and collaboration, but also one where we are encouraged and motivated by your words and by your commitment. Our mandate has never been more important, nor the demands more urgent. But in carrying out our work it makes a difference to know that our Board stands fully and unambiguously behind us. Thank you.

This morning I spoke with Afghan women who are unable to leave their country, but whose voices must influence what the UN brings to Doha, and elsewhere. I told them that their hopes and ambitions – for peace, for security, for freedom of choice, for movement, and a life free from violence – are universal, the hopes and ambitions of every woman and every girl, everywhere.

It is these rights – of every woman and girl, everywhere - that we serve, together. What they ask for is what they deserve and what we owe them. They remain our very best hope for the future we all want.

Thank you very much.

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