

**First regular session of the UN Women Executive Board  
UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS/UN WOMEN 47th Staff Council: Remarks**

**13 February 2024**

Madam President, Ambassador Markova,  
Madam UN Women Executive Director Bahous,  
Excellencies, Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,  
Deputy Executive Directors  
Colleagues,

**I am honoured to stand before you as UN Women representative and Second Vice Chair of the UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and UN WOMEN Staff Council.** I want to acknowledge that together with Michael Lund, UNDP Representative and Chair of the Staff Council, and Henia Dakkak, UNFPA Representative and First Vice Chair of the Staff Council, we have jointly decided that, in line with our commitment to co-leadership and a feminist approach, I will serve as the speaker for UN Women Executive Board.

**Allow us, as the representatives of the Staff Council, to begin by honouring our colleagues who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of humanity.** The conflict in the Middle East has raised many concerns regarding how it affects the UN system. With more than 150 UN personnel killed in Gaza, as the Secretary-General said in his remarks last December, "*this is the largest single loss of life in the history of our Organization.*" We thank the Secretary-General and our agencies' leadership for their tireless efforts to secure a humanitarian cease-fire, the release of all hostages and the protection of all civilian populations on both sides of this conflict and the UN personnel. We are, however, concerned about the unfounded attacks against many UN entities, including UN Women and its Executive Leadership. We cannot overemphasize how critical it is that any member of the UN family can carry out their work to support our organizations' mission and mandates in safe and secure conditions.

**Madam President,**

**Personnel's voice and inclusion are particularly important during change management processes and the Staff Council is ready to bridge the communications between the Executive Leadership and personnel.**

During UN-Women's "pivoting to the field" initiative, which aims to reallocate resources effectively, Staff Council representatives have advocated for involving personnel in these changes. Concerns about the impact on personnel's family lives and personal circumstances have been voiced, with questions about relocation criteria, changes in roles and responsibilities, and alignment with organizational goals. The Staff Council advocates for early open communication and a transparent, participatory decision-making, human-centric and feminist approach to build trust, address challenges, and improve the initiative's effectiveness. Involving personnel early in the process can reduce fear of change and safeguard their mental well-being while contributing to a smooth transition.

**Staff Council is committed to supporting colleagues in affiliated personnel contracts in their quest for better service conditions.** UN Women's engagement in discussing PSA modalities and openness to using

various UN Common System service providers is commendable. However, the recent draft of the "Joint Inspection Unit Report on Review and Use of Non-Staff Personnel" prompts us to urge careful consideration of the implications of a non-staff expansion strategy. While non-staff personnel offers flexibility and rapid response, sustaining and growing a dedicated UN staff is strategically more effective for long-term goals, including impact, institutional development, gender expertise, and building strong strategic partnerships.

**Career advancement is crucial for our organizations to go to new heights.** The Staff Council has consistently advocated for career advancement opportunities for employees with higher performance levels. Detail assignments at UN Women provide enriching experiences, and there's potential to make them more inclusive and developmental in nature. We suggest a joint effort by management and Human Resources to create a comprehensive career growth strategy, which should include training, mentorship, and coaching, catering to different contract types, with a special focus on national staff, young professionals and general service staff. Such a strategy aligns with accountability principles and strategic contract use, positioning UN Women as a leader in promoting productive employment and decent work.

**As part of its change management process, UN Women has effectively modernized its operational framework by implementing Quantum as its new enterprise risk management system.** The Staff Council recognizes the efforts of the Management and Administration Division and Programme Support and Management Unit in addressing challenges like increased workload during Quantum's implementation. We also recognize the adaptability and commitment of UN Women's personnel at all levels, which have been critical to Quantum's integration. Special thanks to **General Service colleagues** for their proactive training participation and 'learn by doing' approach, crucial in mastering Quantum and enhancing business processes and continuity.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the ability of UN staff to meet and often surpass performance expectations under flexible working conditions.** This highlights the importance of a culture of trust and support at UN Women, especially as we transition to the new Flexible Work Policy. Recognizing the diverse needs of our workforce and balancing them with organizational operations is essential for maintaining our status as an attractive and competitive employer. Transparency in decision-making and fair access to Flexible Work Arrangements are crucial. Considering each staff member's unique situation, beyond traditional caretaking roles, is important. We urge managers to engage in open, empathetic discussions with their teams to understand individual circumstances, emphasizing compassionate and exemplary leadership.

**The Staff Council is generally concerned about personnel representation in our organizations, especially when most of the workforce holds non-staff contracts.** At UN Women, staff contracts account for 36 percent of the total. In 2023, the Staff Council introduced associate membership for non-staff personnel at headquarters and country offices, yet this doesn't fully address representation rights. Despite efforts for inclusivity, not all colleagues have equal representation. In 2024, we plan to discuss representation gaps with management in the four organizations. Our global Staff Association, with the currently established 78 Local Staff Committees and the Staff Council, recognizes the dedication of local staff representatives, especially where representation is limited. It is critical to continue working towards an organizational culture of openness and support where every colleague feels empowered and safe to voice concerns without fearing retaliation. This approach fosters a positive work environment and strengthens our collective mission by encouraging open dialogue and mutual respect.

Madam President, distinguished members of UN Women Executive Board,

**In the fall of 2023, the Staff Council conducted by-elections for the five open seats on the Council.** The elections were successful, and we are pleased to welcome five new staff representatives from UNDP and UNOPS to the 47<sup>th</sup> Staff Council and to thank them for their willingness to support personnel's labour rights and enable better working conditions.

**All issues raised in these remarks are part of our Programme of Work for 2023-2024, approved at our Annual General Meeting on 14 February 2023,** and we remain committed to continuing to protect and promote our personnel's rights and working conditions. In 2024, we will establish a well-functioning Global Forum of staff representatives. We will safeguard staff interests in policy dialogues and during organizational change processes. We will engage closely on staff issues in the UN Common System through our federation, UNISERV, and strive to improve our workplace.

**Thank you for granting us the opportunity to address the Executive Board.**

The Staff Council extends its heartfelt appreciation to all our colleagues across the globe, especially those who work and live in the most challenging conditions. Our gratitude to UN Women Executive Leadership and the human resource management team for their continued support in our mission to represent our colleagues across UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and UN Women. We count on the support of our Member States in upholding and fostering a conducive and secure environment, thus enabling UN personnel to continue to serve the global community effectively.

Thank you.