

**Address by Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland
At Summit Dialogue on Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
United Nations, New York
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(Check against delivery.)

Distinguished Hosts, Excellencies,

This dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment is of critical humane importance and I am delighted to have the opportunity to participate.

Despite some progress in the twenty years since the Beijing Conference, gender inequality remains the most persistent and prevalent form of human rights violation, globally.

At a time when women's rights are under increasing threat from extremist groups who seek to enslave rather than empower women, there is a compelling need to renew and recommit to the collective commitment made in Beijing twenty years ago and to consider more deeply what remains to be done if we are to achieve women's rights in their fullest sense, and for all women in all circumstances. I think in particular of the vulnerability of migrant women and women among those who are among the displaced people of our planet. Gender equality must be implanted in the minds of all our citizens, and while Ireland recognises that there are areas in which we have further to go in achieving equality for women in our own country. And while Ireland has made gender equality a priority area of our foreign policy, our strategies at home and abroad will be, I know, all the more robust because of our new universal commitment.

Since its election to the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2013, Ireland has taken every opportunity to highlight the right of all girls in every country to quality education. We have emphasised the centrality of promoting women's participation in decision-making at all levels and the importance of eradicating harmful practices, especially female genital mutilation.

Ireland is firmly dedicated to the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 recognising as it does the negative impact of conflict on women and girls and the particular contribution of women to peace-building, and we have recently published the second National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security .

A particular priority is attached to the prevention of and response to gender-based violence, including institutional violence, which undermines the health, well-being and livelihoods of millions of women around the world. We should not have to wait fifteen years to end violence against women and girls. And I think too that any paradigm of gender equality is not the gift of men, either generously or reluctantly given. Gender equality is a right achieved, not a gift, and during all those visits I made recently to Africa, I could see that gender equality cuts across all areas and arrangements in economics and trade must be such as will impact on the achievement of gender equality in a positive direction. They must assist its achievement, never obstruct it.

Let us be clear: we cannot achieve the new Sustainable Development Goals if we do not achieve gender equality. If we do not enable the true empowerment of women and girls worldwide our declarations will be shown to have been empty rhetoric. We must change, gather momentum in our change, so that this does not happen.

Thank you.