

**Opening Statement by UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women,
Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**

Executive Board, First Regular Session, 9 February 2016

Mr. President,
Members of the Executive Board,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and friends,
Good morning.

Please allow me to thank and recognize the fine leadership of our outgoing President, Ambassador Ib Petersen of Denmark. He has steered the excellent 2015 Bureau and Board during their tenure through an exceptional year for UN Women.

I also warmly thank the whole Bureau of 2015 for their commitment and hard work. We look forward to hearing again today from Ambassador Petersen as he presents the report of the Joint Field Visit to Jordan, under Agenda item 3. We look forward to his continued active participation on achieving the vision of Agenda 2030.

I am also honoured to congratulate our new President of the Board, Ambassador Mohamed Khaled Khiari, Permanent Representative of Tunisia; and our Vice-Presidents: Ms. Vesna Baus (Croatia), Ambassador Heiko Thoms (Germany), Ms. Miriam MacIntosh (Suriname) and Ms. Ameirah Obaid Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates). I am honoured to welcome the 17 new members of the Bureau for 2016.

Starting 2016 as we mean to go on

2015 was a significant year for UN Women, with an extraordinary line-up of global processes that set the trajectory for the coming years. I recognize and thank you for making sure that political leadership for gender equality and women's empowerment was sustained throughout, despite challenges. This is the hallmark that we hope to see for this development era under Agenda 2030 – gender equality and women's empowerment at the core of the Agenda, and top-level leadership to sustain it.

You led the way on this at our “Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Commitment to Action” at the end of last year. Seventy heads of state and government took the floor that day and, to date, 90 national commitments have been made. I encourage all members of this Board to ensure that their governments are represented. This is essential if we are to step up our efforts to implement Agenda 2030, starting now.

Commission on the Status of Women CSW60

Next month, as you well know, is the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, from 14-24 March. The preparations are well under way under the leadership of the Chair: H.E. Mr. Antonio de Aguiar Patriota (Brazil).

The priority theme is: Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development. The review theme is: The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. These themes and more are vibrantly alive in our work and our planning. We even have a special two-day "youth forum" with their own agreed conclusions to precede the formal CSW event.

We have to ensure CSW 60 is not imprisoned in a 'business as usual' cage. Agenda 2030 is anything but business as usual. Together we called for a bold and transformative agenda. Member States made far reaching inputs and supported a transformative agenda all the way. Thanks to all of you, we have it to uphold and to create the future we want for men, women, girls and boys. We will start the countdown to 2030 at CSW60, the single largest forum for women's voices.

Amplifying women's voices

We keep listening to women's voices, and making sure that their words are amplified for others to hear and to heed. At lunchtime today we are showcasing some of the civil society programmes in fragile contexts that our Fund for Gender Equality supports. These are narrated by the women themselves.

It is the personal testimonies that are so powerful, as I found when hearing from the Syrian women last week at the London Donor Conference on "Supporting Syria and the region". We applaud the donors for their unparalleled pledges and contributions towards alleviating the plight of Syrian people and surrounding countries.

We have to make sure dedicated investment in women and girls now flows from the financial commitments made in London. This is the essential link to the finding of the Secretary-General's Global Study and our work on the review of implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 - that women are essential to the sustainability and success of peace, for example increasing the durability of peace accords by 35 per cent.

In this regard I would like to thank the Government of Norway, CARE International, Oxfam and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom for hosting another meeting in London. This meeting was to meet representatives of the Women's Advisory Board to the Peace Talks. The Board that has just been announced contains 12 independent Syrian women civil society representatives from diverse backgrounds and affiliations. They will advise Mr. de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy on Syria, throughout the peace process. This bold move is a first, and is a significant breakthrough.

UN Women and DPA value the strong collaboration with the office of the Special Envoy, and we thank the Government of the Netherlands which provided strong support for the Syrian women who have now so courageously stepped forward. We are proud to have been closely involved in the evolution of this new Board. We hope that their voices will bring the crucial missing element to the peace talks when they resume in Geneva.

Building women's economic empowerment

I am also pleased to inform the Board of the Secretary-General's announcement of a new High Level Panel for Women's Economic Empowerment. The Panel is designed to address the current barriers to women's economic empowerment that would limit achievement of Agenda 2030. Its inaugural meeting will be during the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Its first set of action-oriented recommendations will be published in September this year.

The panel combines the knowledge, networks and voice of members from government, small and big business, academia, youth and civil society, including the heads of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group. UN Women will host the independent Secretariat of the Panel with the backing of the United Kingdom. The co-Chairs are President Luis Guillermo Solís of Costa Rica and CEO of IKEA Switzerland, Simona Scarpaleggia.

IMPACT Champions Parity Report

As you know we have made engagement of men and boys a focus area of work. Through the HeforShe campaign, we have reached out to find champions - 10 heads of state, 10 heads of universities and 10 CEOs of leading multinational companies. We call this initiative IMPACT 10x10x10.

The champion CEOs have worked with us to generate and announce previously undisclosed data on the current state of gender parity in their companies. Last month at the World Economic Forum they spoke of their plans for change for their one million employees in ten industries. Through this initiative the CEOs lead from the front. Together they have committed to achieving gender parity in their companies by 2020. The companies are AccorHotels, Barclays, Koc Holdings, McKinsey & Company, Pricewaterhouse Coopers, Schneider Electric, Tupperware Brands, Twitter, Unilever and Vodafone.

This is one of the scalable interventions aimed at increased participation of women at all levels in the workforce. Transformative change requires multiple interventions. That belief lies behind our intention to support the creation of a new global coalition to support comprehensive action on equal pay. This is an injustice women face in every corner of the world. Solving it will also require change in legislation. In this task we hope to benefit from our partnership with parliaments through IPU, and in collaboration with yourselves and your capitals.

The Beijing +20 review showed that many outdated laws have already been repealed and new anti-discrimination laws introduced, in line with CEDAW recommendations, but progress is still too slow. The projection according to WEF's Global Gender Gap Report 2015 is that without change in the current trajectories it will take 118 years to close the gender pay gap.

Agenda 2030 gives us a chance for change to come sooner, and efforts be coordinated. Together with partners like yourselves, our IMPACT Champions, mobilized youth, and other new partners, we aim to achieve measurable change by 2020 and build from there.

The road to 2030 needs a roadmap with very specific milestones and strong accountability. That is why the indicators of the SDGs are so important to us and to you. They are the tool through which we can calibrate our steps. We have been active in supporting countries in their choice of indicators to track the SDG commitments. Right from this year, we are monitoring the data that they will produce. We will pay close attention to what that data tells us about the pace of progress and where to course correct. Technical and financial support for gender statistics are urgently needed. Without support and without the data our ability to monitor the SDGs will be compromised.

Migrants and refugees

Large-scale migration and an overall increase in the refugee population in developing countries as well as in developed countries, is one of the challenges of our time. Women are at the heart of this, and are not yet sufficiently visible. The resilience of women and girls must be prioritized as a strategy to address the needs and rights of the most marginalized and vulnerable. This is true for women fleeing disaster, en route as they travel, or at home in the host populations.

As the Chair of the Global Migration Group in 2016 we will aim to increase attention to gender equality and women's empowerment in migration. At the World Humanitarian Summit in Turkey in May this year, there will be a round table dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian action. At this event, and as we look ahead to Habitat III and safer cities, we will continue to seek solutions to the extra burden and risks faced by women.

Zika virus disease

Another important lesson learnt recently was from the Ebola outbreak. Adolescent girls and young women are among the most marginalized and at-risk populations, both in situations of displacement, and in a health crisis. These risks have been brought sharply into focus in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean, which is experiencing the unprecedented spread of Zika virus disease. Young women need to be given special attention where rates of unplanned teen pregnancy and prevalence of sexual violence are high.

UN Women is collaborating closely with the World Health Organization, Governments, and civil society to fight the epidemic of Zika virus disease and to support affected women and families.

We want to ensure a rights-based approach. We are as determined as we were in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, where we were integrally involved with the efforts to protect girls and women from Ebola.

In Sierra Leone, UN Women and UNICEF were honoured by presidential awards in December last year for exceptional contribution in the fight against Ebola. That experience gave us very important lessons in mobilizing women, and in public education. We are now turning that knowledge to confront this new threat to women and girls, and the communities they live in.

CSW60 is a stepping stone to 2030

There is no shortage of lessons learnt from review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and other key reviews. We know what we have to do. The Commission on the Status of Women, next month, is the first within Agenda 2030. We look forward to inspirational ideas on implementation and acceleration from ministers, civil society and youth alike.

As UN Women, we go to this CSW ready to make a call and to present the key actions needed between now and 2020 that will build the momentum to 2030. We must commit to overcome challenges, not just work on them, and ensure we focus on leaving no one behind.

As we work through this year on our Midterm Review of the UN Women Strategic Plan 2014-2017, let me assure you that we are taking all this into account. The review process provides an important platform through which to assess the implications of the changing global context. It is a moment to shape our strategic priorities for the critical period of 2018-2022.

Our work as UN Women in the coming years is geared towards addressing these challenges in scale. Our flagship programmes tackle the core barriers and scale up action through partnership. We depend on your political and financial support to make this happen, and to continue to transform the UN into an organization that is fit for purpose and financed for purpose in every respect.

In conclusion, may I encourage more member states to follow Colombia's lead, in considering the gender of the next Secretary-General? This is more than a question of a single appointment. It concerns our approach within the world and the UN as a whole on women's representation in higher positions and levels of decision-making. This is in an area in which the Secretary-General has been making efforts and we continue to support him in this.

But there is further to go – so please join the Group of Friends convened by Colombia to call for the next leader of the United Nations to be a woman. Forty-nine countries are already in this group. And ... because it's 2016.

Thank you.