

Closing remarks by Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, at the Annual Session of the UN-Women Executive Board

28 June 2017

(As delivered)

Thank you very much, Madame President, Executive Board and colleagues. Thanks for your guidance, Madame President, that has enabled us to work so efficiently. I also thank you for your strong words at the opening of the session. We highly appreciate the support that you are giving us. I recall your injunction “not to leave the discussion on gender equality in this room” and to “act as champions of gender equality” as we leave the room, and wherever we are. Of course, the members of the Board are gender champions in different ways, and I think now we have a version of our strategic plan to which we can now together dedicate a lot of energy.

I want to thank the members of the Bureau as well for their hard work. I think this has been demonstrated by the way we have worked efficiently in this session; the way we have been able to agree on directions of the strategic plan; the way we have also been able to also conclude the decisions just made. It is truly a tribute to the hard work of the Bureau and their preparations.

And of course, I thank all the members that have participated in the period leading up to this Executive Board session.

Something special happened during this Board. Not only was it a highly participatory and diverse Board session, but of the 42 delegates who delivered national statements - 21 were men and 21 were women. I think that’s Planet 50 – 50! It is not usually like this, so progress is actually happening and we truly appreciate that.

There were many important messages in the statements that you made. Namibia, for instance, shared information on the high level of participation of women in their parliament, which is also enshrined in their constitution. Armenia shared an update with us on their quota system there, which is facilitating higher representation of women. Iran spoke about women’s representation which has increased in recent years; and in one city council election seats held by women moved from 185 to 415, which is impressive. Canada informed us about the launch of their Feminist International Assistance Policy, and the priority they are giving to sexual and reproductive health and rights. France has joined the group of countries with a gender-equal cabinet. I think this is a trend in the manner in which women are being represented - from the 50-50 here in the country statements to 50-50 in the capital. Something good is happening and it is encouraging.

We had a positive response from you on the Annual Report, and we have noted the issues that you have raised.

On the strategic plan draft, we have started integrating your comments and will further fine-tune the text in accordance with your interventions. We note your wish for clarity of impact and output, and of what difference we make. I think you wanted clear black and white answers; the fact that you want to demonstrate both the value that we bring as UN Women and the value that you bring, together with the other sister agencies. You asked us to ensure that we present the results of our work in the clearest way possible, and emphasized the importance of being rights-based in our work. All of these issues will be reflected in the next version.

I also want to thank the delegations that highlighted with appreciation the consultative process that led to this draft of the strategic plan, including the transparency of process and the inclusive way in which we work. From our perspective, we really appreciated the amount of time that you gave to this, which reflects the dedication of our Bureau and the leadership of our Board.

We thank the members who highlighted the importance of resources, the many who affirmed our triple mandate and the need to ensure balance in the manner in which we implement our work within our mandate. You said that we must ensure that we are not overstretched, and pay attention to the fact that resources are limited. I suppose you are asking us not to overpromise and underdeliver, but under-promise and overdeliver, so we are taking that to heart.

We noted with appreciation the Member States who highlighted their increased contributions to UN Women, such as Japan and Iceland. This is always good news. Of course, we also appreciate the continued financial support for UN Women from Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, and Sweden. We appreciate the fact that we are the number one UN Agency that UAE supports, and the fact that more of you are moving towards the multiyear funding that gives us better certainty.

Like yourselves we are looking forward to the Secretary-General's reform process, and the opportunities that this will bring to enable us to be flexible, nimble and responsible, and yet continue to be dedicated to the mantra of leaving no one behind.

I also appreciated the remarks that were made by some of you on gender parity - Pakistan, Namibia and Denmark - and the fact that you also emphasized the importance of moving away from working in silos - points that were made by Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the United States.

So the discussion has been very rich, and is concluded now by the decisions just adopted, which highlight some of the gaps. We commit ourselves to working diligently to address the areas that still need to be addressed.

I hope the presentation on Somalia gave you an insight into some of the difficulties in the countries where we work, the cost of security, and at the same time the determination of our team, notwithstanding all of those challenges.

We do hope that in Somalia, with the new political climate, we will be able to do more work and that next time we report on Somalia to you, we will not be talking about security, we will be talking about impact and the difference that we are making. There is already such a high number of women participating at leadership level, and in parliament - something that we contributed towards facilitating - that I think we are on the right track. I thank our Regional Director Izeduwa Derex-Briggs who made the presentations.

In this session there has been a constant emphasis on the importance of partnerships, and a recognition that for us, UN Women, partnerships are about survival. But you also cautioned us about making sure that these partnerships were adding value, and not just partnerships for the sake of it.

We appreciate that you constantly highlight the issue of gender-based violence and ending violence against women. A number of you also raised the issue of sexual and reproductive health and rights and the need for us to even be more active in our work in that area.

Another area that received a lot of support is focusing on women with disability. This is an area where we are paying attention, as is the emphasis on working with youth.

Women's economic empowerment as usual came out very strongly, and we are glad that coming fresh out of CSW 61 we have a lot of material that supports the work that we are doing there. The report by the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment is an important document that has guided us, and we thank the UK for having championed the process that has given us this report.

You also encouraged us to continue to work with men and boys, and in fact, to do more and better in that area, making sure that leads to substance. We have taken that to heart.

There was an emphasis again on women, peace and security and humanitarian action, and a recognition that we are doing more work there, with a caution to ensure that we are not overstretched.

I highly appreciated your support and encouragement on the news that the Secretary-General has recommended the renewal of my term as Executive Director of UN Women and I am very grateful for the support you have given.

Namibia asked us to work together, and used the Swahili word "harambe", which means working together. All I can say is, this is "harambe" time. The strategic plan is all about "harambe-ing" together.

So, I thank you very much for your support, and I thank the leadership of the Board, as well as Jean-Luc Bories and his team for their work.

Thank you.