

Opening Remarks by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director UN Women

**Executive Board Second Regular Session,
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As delivered

Madame President,
Members of the Executive Board,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and friends,

Thank you so much, Madame President, for a very inspiring and encouraging presentation. It is hard to believe that this is the last Executive Board session presided over by yourself. It has been an intense but very fast year. Thank you so much for all your support and your dedication as President of the Executive Board; for your constructive and open dialogue with UN Women and for your invaluable advice and support.

We will continue to count on you, as you say, to be our champion, especially but not limited to ways of addressing UN Women's resource mobilization challenge, which you have so competently outlined.

I would also like to extend my gratitude for the work of the whole Bureau: Ambassador Ivana Pajevic from Montenegro, Gail Farnagalo from Liberia, Shiraz Mohamed from Guyana and Nicolas Randin from Switzerland. I thank you all for your extensive work and dedication throughout the year, particularly the tireless work in facilitating decisions, chairing meetings and encouraging dialogue between UN Women and the Member States, and between and amongst Member States.

It is to this Board that I owe my thanks for their endorsement of my second term in office, which was facilitated very competently by you, Madame President. Thank you very much for this opportunity to serve again.

Excellencies, we are at a critical point, on the eve of the adoption of the new UN Women Strategic Plan for 2018-2021. It is an exciting moment for UN Women as we depart in a planned way from our previous Strategic Plan, from which we have learned so much and achieved so much.

It is also an iconic moment for the UN System; a time for bold changes.

This management and planning tool - the Strategic Plan - aims to directly tackle the structural causes of gender-based discrimination and inequality through the repeal of discriminatory laws; the transformation of discriminatory social norms and stereotypes, and the strengthening and support of institutions so that they can deliver equally for women and men.

We are already seeing momentum building for change in these structural aspects. The changes that we see are very encouraging, notwithstanding the challenges that we continue also to see. There are signals of progress being made to end discrimination against women in many parts of the world, since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

Let me take a moment to highlight these moves, which have taken years to achieve but have implications for generations to come. That is what structural changes are about. Change that lasts. Change that will sustain generations.

In the last two months, Jordan and Lebanon have repealed articles of their penal code that had previously allowed men who had raped a woman to avoid punishment if they married the victim. They join Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia, which have also repealed such legislation. And on 26 July this year, Tunisia passed the most comprehensive violence against women law in the region, which includes domestic violence and sexual harassment.

Also, last month, three Latin American countries acted to end child marriage: Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. And a few days ago, Trinidad and Tobago took their next step. We are moving forward. These successes demonstrate the persistence of civil society and women's organizations, the resilience and commitment of government, and the strong partnerships that we have all developed. They have underlined the vital importance of consistent and relentless follow through with a wide range of partners.

The Strategic Plan articulates better than ever before how our triple mandate of normative support, UN coordination and operational activities can be implemented for greater impact.

I have given several examples of how progress is being made on the normative front, but in coordination and implementation there is also progress.

Recently, we have begun a partnership with the EU and the UN System to end violence against women. Within that partnership we have a responsibility for coordination such as we have never had before, and we thank the EU for that privilege. This is a new way of delivering on SDGs in an integrated and joined-up manner, together with different agencies and with other partners. This is also what makes the joint chapter so important.

This is not a moment for us not to work together; it is a moment to consolidate, in line with the expectation of the QCPR.

Whether we consider the high rate of femicides in Latin America, the targeting of women and girls in conflict zones, the harassment of women running for public office across the world, violence against women remains one of the most serious obstacles to the realization of women's political, economic and social rights today.

It is a barrier to women that exists in every country, with cumulative layers of discrimination on the basis of race, age, class, disability, education, ethnicity and gender.

There can be no true equality while violence against women persists.

Through our triple mandate, we can make changes that penetrate long-standing cultures and environments – as was envisaged in the 2030 Agenda. In this Strategic Plan, we make bold steps to move in that direction.

Together we have an opportunity in these next four years to do the very practical work that will ensure we leave no one behind, something I know we all believe in.

With your backing for the Strategic Plan, we will pursue five main outcome areas, focused on very concrete and specific results for women's lives. For instance, we will continue to support Member States' efforts to strengthen and implement global norms and standards.

We have also taken steps to make sure that we will support efforts – our own and yours – for women to participate equally in society and to benefit equally from governance systems. This work will include support for more than 170 gender equality reforms by electoral stakeholders by 2021, enhancing the chances of some 25,000 women to participate in political life - much needed change. We aim to see 50 national gender equality action plans developed and costed, and more than 40 Ministries of Finance increase resources for gender equality work. We will work with approximately 1,200 data producers and users each year to improve gender equality statistics and thus sharpen allocation of scarce resources for maximum impact. We will also be in a much better position to report on results, something that is critical in the era we are moving in.

We want to move forward to assure that women can attain income security, decent work and economic autonomy. We will work on more than 400 legal or policy frameworks to create decent work, enhance social protection and reduce unpaid care work for women. In order to benefit women in the informal sector, we want to see at least 160 government entities or businesses prioritizing women in their procurement. Our experience of working collaboratively and within the national parameters and structures ensures that we will be working with the best partners in this regard.

We will be working with rural women to make sure they have access to productive resources, whether it is through our platform *BuyFromWomen* or by leveraging the work of other entities, such as FAO, and other agencies, again making the common chapter dynamic and alive.

We want to see violence against women comprehensively prevented and responded to. We will nearly double the number of countries that have both legislation and budget provisions to address violence against women. We plan to reach a modest 44 countries, which needs to increase dramatically. By 2021, more than 120 action plans should address social norms to prevent violence against women. Close to 70 countries should provide information on essential services with our support, which will be reinforced by the work that we will be doing to build capacity to collect and use data. And we will expand our Safe Cities programme, which will ensure that we increase the safety of women in public spaces.

We also want to see more women and girls contribute to peace and security and benefit from prevention efforts and humanitarian action. We will work to increase the number of women mediators, negotiators and experts to peace negotiations and support about 160 civil society organizations per year to participate in peace processes. We will deploy an average of 25 sexual and gender-based violence justice experts per year. We will work with partners to increase funding earmarked for women in peacebuilding and humanitarian response.

Together, these results will impact billions of women and girls around the world with a focus on those most at risk, and we will ensure that we do everything we can not to leave anyone behind. Through both your efforts and ours to improve results measurement, we want to be able to fully measure the extent of our impact through this Strategic Plan.

We need the Strategic Plan – both us and you - in order to be the best that we can be.

Distinguished delegates, UN Women is ideally situated to support and inform the initiatives of the Secretary-General aimed at repositioning the UN Development System as well as ensuring that the UN reaches gender parity in the time set. Gender equality and the empowerment of women as a cross-cutting issue can bring the UN system closer together. We are the glue that can play an effective role to hold together the UN System on one of its most important missions.

Gender equality is the number one area of concentration of UN joint programmes. This gives us a real opportunity to reap the full collaborative advantages of the UN Country Team.

We are committed to the continued use of the UN Development Assistance Framework as a strategic planning instrument to enhance coherence and joint action.

We will continue to work to identify what measures will lead to a more effective and efficient UN System, in particular at the country level, where we are able to make tangible and predictable impact.

We have already embarked on a review of our field presence, with the objective of maximizing the use of existing resources and impact on the ground in order to enhance system-wide coherence.

On the Integrated Budget, distinguished delegates, it goes without saying that the Strategic Plan needs to be resourced so that it can be a reality. We are proposing an integrated budget with projected voluntary contributions of 880 million dollars for 2018-2019 and request an institutional budget appropriation of 203.8 million dollars.

The two-year integrated budget is aligned with the four-year Strategic Plan and is complemented with assessed contributions funding under the Regular Budget of the United Nations.

I take the work on accountability very seriously. Financial accountability has ensured that UN Women, year after year, has produced clean audits. To enable us to continue this important trend, we want to make sure that, as we decentralize, we are stronger at the international level, but also are active system-wide, within and amongst our UN Agencies.

We need to strengthen our capacity so that the centre can hold.

I am kindly requesting the upgrade of the P5 Chief of Accounts to a D1 Deputy Director level. This is a comparable level among UN peers for a controller, who can advocate for gender mainstreaming in the UN system-wide budget and finance fora. As we play our role as a coordinator of the UN System, we need to make sure that when we deploy our people they are shoulder to shoulder with their peers in the system.

I am also grateful to our 193 donors, most of them Member States, who provided the financial means for UN Women in 2016, and to the majority among them who are renewing, and even expanding, their contributions in 2017.

In 2016 alone, 46 member states expanded their financial support, with 9 countries more than doubling their overall voluntary contributions, while 16 countries doubled or more than doubled their core contribution. We are truly thankful for this support.

We have enjoyed the fastest pace of growth among sister agencies since 2012, albeit from a low base, often building progressively from the UNIFEM baseline. This, we hope we can change.

Although core resources in particular are very stretched, we also know this is a challenging environment for Member States, therefore our IB budget projections are relatively conservative.

Our resourcing plan counts on limited but sustained annual growth of core contributions (9%: fully commensurate with the past performance). This increment of 60 million dollars in core contributions is the equivalent of 0.2% of all voluntary contributions to CEB agencies. It is therefore a small gesture but with great impact for SDG5 and the broader SDG agenda.

UN Women's private sector and non-traditional donors' contributions doubled in 2016 and we will work for this trend to continue and even accelerate.

We also anticipate strong and sustained growth from our joint programmes, which again will mean that we have higher impact in our delivery. We look forward to your support as we take this direction.

We have developed a structured resource mobilization strategy for 2018-2021, building on a careful analysis of variables in all potential income segments. We will count on your sustained support, including earlier delivery of pledges, fewer donor-specific agreements and reporting requirements, more frequent support at the thematic level globally or at the country strategic note level and sustained growth of UN Women regular resources.

Distinguished delegates, the process of developing the Strategic Plan started one year ago. Our President has underlined that we held 10 informals, discussed it in three formal sessions, and circulated an unprecedented number of four drafts. Throughout the process, we have carefully listened to your comments and guidance and taken them into account to the extent that we can as we reworked the text. We believe the Strategic Plan strikes a good balance between your priorities, both what we have heard from you as different delegations and what we know exists on the ground as needs. It provides us with a solid framework to respond to your requests for support. It enables us to continue to act as a trusted partner in your countries, working to address the challenges you have identified.

Our track record on this speaks for itself.

Evaluations have emphasized the direct alignment of UN-Women's programming with national priorities and the high level of national ownership for UN-Women programmes. That commitment to national alignment is one of our core strengths, one that we are proud of and will protect. This is allied to our drive for innovative and broad reaching action throughout partnership, in government, in private sector, in civil society and in the communities that we work with.

Today, I call for your strong support for our Plan – *your* Plan.

We do not have the luxury of missing opportunities to change the lives of women and girls and to leave no one behind. We must not miss a unique opportunity to be the drivers of change in this coming four years.

This moment is therefore one of real urgency. The lives of women and girls depend on the decisions that we will make today and in the coming future. We cannot and must not stall the forward momentum I noted at the start of my speech. We have built invaluable goodwill and relationships among old and new partners in public and private sectors. We must use this investment optimally. It has been with you that we have been able to nurture these partnerships. As the Executive Board, you play a key role in ensuring that UN Women can perform effectively to achieve results for women and girls.

In your support for us you rise to the expectations of your citizens, who care about equality and access to justice for women and girls, and their economic empowerment and full participation in society.

Your endorsement of the new Strategic Plan will allow us to immediately ramp up our support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Together we can make sure that the women and girls who currently have no protection from an abuser, can in future be protected because we have made access to justice and protection possible.

Together we can make sure that the millions of women who till the land but have no chance to overcome poverty, or the ability to have enough food for themselves and to sell their produce, can change their situation.

Together we have the opportunity to make sure that we address the unmet needs of women whose voices are not heard. Women who are not represented effectively will be able to have representatives in their parliament who will speak up for them and make sure that someone fights for equal pay for work of equal value; that someone fights in their parliament in order to make sure that unpaid care work is addressed.

Today we have an opportunity to make sure that young girls and women have an opportunity to enter into STEM careers and to be part and parcel of the digital economy and contributors in their own nation-building and in the improvement of the quality of their own lives.

With your support, we can together lead the way to substantive equality as envisaged in the 2030 Agenda.

All of it is in the Strategic Plan that you have so nurtured.

The Strategic Plan is the means to coordinate the big bold steps needed to realize our ambitious goals for the women and girls of the world.

This is the time when we have to respond to their impatient wait.

This is what UN Women is ready to deliver with you for the women of the world.

Thank you.