

“It is the role of innovation to disrupt “business as usual” —Executive Director

UN Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka’s speech to the UN Women Executive Board, First Regular Session of 2018

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[As delivered]

I would like to start by recognizing our new President and Bureau. First, allow me to congratulate Ambassador Pajevic for assuming her new role as the President of UN Women’s Executive Board. I already know the Ambassador well. She served with distinction last year as the Vice-President for our Board. She facilitated important decisions and chaired meetings with dedication.

Her Presidency is the reflection of Montenegro’s commitment to gender equality and the Ambassador’s commitment to the work of UN-Women and the women and girls of the world. I look forward to continuing our close collaboration throughout the year.

I would also like to acknowledge and congratulate the new Vice-Presidents for their election: Ms. Christine Kalamwina, Deputy Permanent Representative of Zambia, Mr. Lee Jooil from the Republic of Korea, Ms. Desirée Cedeño from Panama and Mr. Jyrki Terva from Finland. I wish them all the best for their work in the Bureau.

I would also like to once again thank Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh, Permanent Representative of UAE, for her extraordinary work and inspirational leadership as President of the Executive Board last year.

This is an exciting time for UN Women and the drive for women’s rights. Our Secretary-General is leading this charge. He has been clear about the priority he places on re-balancing the system and the improvements he expects throughout the reform programme.

Just last month he announced full gender parity in the 44-member UN Senior Management Group, and emphasized the empowerment of women everywhere as a “cross-cutting imperative” for the UN. We are glad to be part of this and see the inclusion of gender parity in the ‘Major UN Reform Tracks’ as important step for the whole UN system.

The progress made in one year to reach gender parity in the UN senior management, for the first time in the life of the 72-year-old UN, demonstrates that change is possible in a short space of time when driven from the top.

We are actively engaged in the Secretary-General’s bold agenda to strategically reposition the

UN Development System. UN Women is determined to see better UN-wide results at country level and preserve the strong role of the UN in promoting human rights and equality for all. For that to happen, a coherent approach is essential, which is why we welcome the common chapter of the Strategic Plans.

We are implementing the commitments of the common chapter, working with our sister agencies UNDP, UNICEF and UNFP). In line with their reports to their respective Executive Boards, I wish to report that:

We are acting collectively on two fronts.

First, we are drafting clear, flexible guidance for our country offices to help them use existing mechanisms, processes and programmatic activities to drive collaboration, while avoiding duplication.

Second, we are examining ways of going further to increase development impact through greater collaborative advantage, making full use of our existing collective programmatic footprint, expertise and operational assets as well as complementary mandates.

Initiatives that might emerge from this analysis would target collective results and joined-up effort aimed at transformational change, and offer a sound basis for partnerships with other entities of the UNDS and beyond.

We will provide further updates on implementation of the common chapter through the year.

In terms of the implementation of our new Strategic Plan itself; I am pleased to share the following brief update:

We have adapted all our planning systems to make sure all offices are aligned with the new Plan, and conducted the annual work planning exercise to bring its first year to life in practical detail.

We have also taken action to plan for and measure performance against the Strategic Plan, for example: setting up an online scorecard to enhance transparency and communicating results; validating all the data in the result framework; and putting in place mechanisms to ensure that our programming is refocused on leaving no one behind both in our policy and programme work.

I would also like to inform the Board that its decision in August 2017 to create an oversight office from the consolidation of internal audit with independent evaluation has been put into action. The evaluation function continues to be independent both in organizational and

functional aspects.

I am pleased also to inform the Board that our total revenue (that is of both core and non-core financial resources) has reached 355 million dollars in 2017 according to our preliminary count.

However, though this is the highest annual revenue since the establishment of UN Women, we still have a shortfall of 115 million dollars of the projection in the Integrated Budget of 470 million dollars. So the hard work continues.

I can further report that we have made improvements during 2017 in key audit areas.

I wish to thank Member States for their support for the five posts approved by the fifth committee. This will enhance our performance and delivery.

We are supporting the evolution of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Support for programmes to enhance gender equality is vital and progress must be monitored. Tomorrow we launch a new global report: "Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" which tracks progress.

The Goals are especially important now, both as a political agenda for global cooperation and as a specific, time-bound set of targets that underline the urgent need for concerted action. Gender inequalities are still found in every dimension of sustainable development, and we need to close the gap. Maintaining the focus on human rights will be critical to keeping the SDGs on track during their implementation.

Next month we celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March in the Trusteeship Council Chamber. I urge all of you to join us for this important observance. The theme, "The Time is Now: Rural and urban activists transforming women's lives", is in part taken from our priority topic for the Commission on the Status of Women.

The priority theme for this year's Commission on the Status of Women is exceptionally important for our efforts to leave no one behind. It focuses on the challenges and also the opportunities we have to empower rural women and girls. We look forward to strong engagement by Member States on this to articulate and realize the rights of rural women and girls.

This year's CSW is missing a very familiar figure. I, and UN Women, have been privileged to have Ms. Lakshmi Puri as Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director. Her dedication and service to the UN, UN Women and to the women and girls of the world was extraordinary, and continues to be. She inspired all of us and helped to shape and build a stronger UN Women. She is fondly missed and her contribution deeply appreciated.

The recruitment for the new ASG is underway and it is our hope that by the time we meet for the June Executive Board we will be able to introduce the new ASG.

One of the central topics for discussion today, with huge implications for those left furthest behind, is innovation. It is the role of innovation to disrupt “business as usual” in policies, management, finance, science and technology and benefit men and women equally.

We are taking exciting steps to implement proofs of concept that creatively use enterprise platforms to provide women with access to finance, markets and innovation with blockchain technology to meet the challenges of women in humanitarian contexts; and mobile technology to provide women and girls with access to education, and prevent violence.

This month we held our first Blockchain Live Simulation event, where Member States, the UN, civil society and the private sector reviewed seven blockchain solutions for women in humanitarian contexts. We will be sharing a short video from this cutting-edge event later today.

Technology and collaboration are critical for high impact in the new development landscape.

UN Women recognized from the start the importance of collaboration and strengthening of the partnership between ourselves, the private sector and civil society. We are building this in every quarter.

Our strengthened collaborations include: joint Townhalls and joint statements with sister agencies (UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO). We have embraced the opportunities of chairing joint programmes for collaborative effectiveness, such as the partnership with UNAIDS.

We welcome region-wide initiatives like the EU’s ‘Spotlight’ Initiative on ending violence against women and girls, where we are pleased to ‘host’ the secretariat on behalf of the Initiative, building on our 20-year experience of work with the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women.

I am pleased to share the following update with you on the important Spotlight initiative. UN Women will be implementing a joint programme with ILO in the ASEAN region for action against trafficking in human beings and sexual and economic exploitation. Interventions will primarily focus on the countries that we are collaborating with, including: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Viet Nam, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

The countries in the Latin American Region for action on femicide are: Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Argentina and provisionally Mexico. And I thank these countries for their collaboration.

The Operational Steering Committee is expected to decide the short-listed countries in Africa for action on sexual violence and harmful practices in mid/end-April. We will keep you posted.

When we last met in August, the 'MeToo' and 'Time's Up' moment had not yet struck. Now there is an all-time-high outcry about the ubiquity of violence against women, including sexual harassment.

There have already been historic moments to be seized by all of us. These moments include when UN Women was formed and gender equality and women's empowerment became an explicit part of the UN; and in 2015 when governments adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with gender equality and women's empowerment at its heart.

This moment of 'MeToo' and 'Time's Up' is another important historic moment. It brings, importantly, the global public voices together with the many voices we have heard at CSW gatherings, from civil society and from many of you in this room.

It is a moment where the power structures and inequalities that have allowed so many people to get away with harming and intimidating others are being almost universally challenged. Impunity is being called out.

The importance for all of us is that this is a moment of accountability and we all have to agree that 'Time is Up'.

We must connect with the global movement of solidarity and ensure our relevance. We too must put our house in order. We know that institutions like our UN, with strong power dynamics and hierarchical frameworks, are fertile environments for situations of sexual harassment and even worse to arise.

As we are responsible for setting standards and guide policy through the work that we do together here, we must be beyond reproach.

The Secretary-General has emphasized 'zero tolerance' and laid out a clear 5-point plan for action. His reform agenda as a whole is a move towards a new frame of relevance for the UN, and a re-balancing of emphases. We all must take this forward in all our work, in our seminal gatherings ahead, in all of the actions that we are planning and in our partnerships.

We are urging and challenging especially the men in the UN to lead in changing the organizational culture that enables impunity and harassment to be possible. Some of you are already leading change in your missions and we thank you for the leadership.

This is a call we hope you can make inside and outside the UN, so that we can make the most of this unprecedented momentum.

Time is truly up!