

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

UN-Women Executive Board, First Regular Session 2021
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[As delivered]

Excellencies, colleagues, we have really been efficient with time today and yet we did not compromise on the important issues that were on our agenda. Thank you so much for this high level of efficiency.

I want to thank our President of the Executive Board, Mr. Alie Kabba, for leading the meeting efficiently, as well as the Vice President for stepping in and making sure that we continued with that high level of efficiency. I want to thank the Bureau for assisting with the meeting and for their contribution as well as the delegations who participated actively in this meeting.

We know that diversity is important in our deliberations and I want to commend the number of Member States who weighed in during the two days of this Executive Board session. We heard a rich range of views from the Africa group, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean and Europe on how UN Women should fulfill its mandate effectively. I want to assure you that we have heard all your voices and that we are committed to work with you and to respond appropriately to many of your requests and suggestions, and to take heed of your advice.

We appreciate the trust and confidence that has been built over the years between the Executive Board and UN Women. It has been 10 years of building a relationship that I think is now formidable.

We also want to thank those who participated in the HIV/AIDS deliberations. We particularly send our thanks and appreciation to the Executive Director of UNAIDS.

We welcome the opening statements of the 27 Member States with their high-level participation and engagement. We share your concerns on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women and girls and we appreciate that almost all your statements mentioned the important areas that need to be attended to.

We want to emphasize the importance of building back better, which means building back greener, equitably, in a gender-responsive manner and in an inclusive manner. We ask that everywhere that the Executive Board of UN Women speaks, you speak about building back better, and you add the fact that building back better includes building back in a gender-responsive manner. As you know, many countries are likely to be spending trillions of dollars in responding to the pandemic. We need to make sure that these large numbers of women, who we

have all said are disproportionately affected, are not forgotten. Words matter. Your words matter.

When you repeat it all the time, wherever you are, it will be heard in the high places where decisions are being made.

If there is one thing that you take away from what we have said in this session of the Executive Board, it is the need for you to assist us in making sure that the efforts invested in engaging International Financial Institutions bear fruit. You are shareholders in these institutions. You have powers that we don't have. We have knocked at the door. We have opened the door. We are inside the room. But we are not decision-makers. You will make the deal close if you too make sure that you speak on our behalf when we are not there. I cannot emphasize this enough. People will die. Women will die. Poverty will wear the face of the woman forever. Women will never go back to pre-pandemic economic activities. Girls will drop out of school. Your words matter. Please speak for women and girls. We must not hear Heads of State, Ministers of Finance, Ministers of Trade and Industry, speak about relief for the pandemic without mentioning what is going to happen to women. If women are not mentioned, women will not benefit. It is as simple as that. So, Excellencies, we ask you to assist us in this regard.

I also want to thank you for raising the issue of gender-disaggregated data, something that we work on and we are very proud of the investments that we have made and the results that we are beginning to see. So, rest assured that we will continue this work.

We heard also your message on the issue of evaluation, and we hear the recommendations that you have made.

The new QCPR resolution has given us the most enabling language we have ever had on how we can work in a coordinated manner in the UN System. It will assist us in our coordination and gender mainstreaming. It will assist us in working with the UN Country Teams, something that we have already begun. And we again thank you for emphasizing the need for us to seize this opportunity to intensify our coordination also in line with the UN Reform.

I want to thank those of you who have made comments about Generation Equality and clarify again that UN Women engages in many activities with all kinds of partners who are dedicated to service to women and girls. These are private sector, young people, academia, sportspeople, people in the arts, Member States, civil society and the women's movement. We don't expect Member States to necessarily be part of everything we do. Some of the people that we work with are strong critics of the United Nations, critics of UN Women, but to the extent that they contribute to advancing the cause of women, we take the criticism on the chin and focus on working with them and making the lives of women and girls better.

In Generation Equality we have all sorts of people; those we work well with, those we are learning to work with. When we disagree with them, we are trying to work step by step so that

we make things better for women and girls. So, [Generation Equality] is not something that we as the UN System control. It is not something that Member States control. It is not something that civil society controls. It is something that everybody controls. Therefore, it is different from an intergovernmental process. But we appreciate that so many Member States have decided, ‘we want to make this work. We are supporting you, and we are helping you to build a new way of working because we see that the problem is so big’.

Today, if we look at the commitment being made by the private sector to Generation Equality, it is the biggest commitment that we have ever had from this sector. If we look at the number of young people who have come to join us and who are dedicated to work with us, it is the largest number of young people from all over the world that we have ever seen. If we look at organizations such as faith-based organizations and others, again it is the strongest showing up that we have ever seen. So, we are onto something good here, something that is important for women and girls. And it is an important time for us to give attention to it. History would be very unkind to us if we missed an opportunity to address and make better the lives of women and girls, when we have people who are willing to work with us, because we were constraining ourselves to the parameters of intergovernmental processes - which we respect, and want to work alongside. We want Generation Equality to benefit from intergovernmental processes and to enrich intergovernmental processes without burdening them with all kinds of people that we are bringing into Generation Equality. I ask you to trust us and indulge us so that one day you will be very proud of what we are trying to do.

I thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the Member States for their insightful presentations, comments and guidance.

Thank you.