

Remarks of Dr. Meshgan Mohammed Al Awar, Secretary General for the Zayed International Prize for the Environment at the UNWomen Special Event: Showcasing Women's Innovation and SEED Gender Equality Award Ceremony

Your excellency Ms. Bachelet, excellencies, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today at this important event showcasing women's innovation. Let me begin by saying that I am honored to speak alongside this panel of impressive women. They exemplify how the creative power of women can deliver concrete solutions to sustainable development challenges.

I would also like to say in particular how pleased I am to be speaking alongside a young woman innovator studying at the Masdar Institute in the United Arab Emirates, Ms. Rasha Ahmed Ali Abd Rabu. Youth like Rasha are the future of our country, and and of our more sustainable global future.

What is innovation? its introducing something new, whether an idea, a product or a device...invention is turning money into ideas and innovation is turning ideas into money. Innovation is the catalyst for economic growth and the UAE's economic growth stems from this innovation across different fields, whether in a government setting, a business setting or a social setting.

In the UAE, we believe that educating and empowering all our citizens to be innovators, particularly women, will be essential to the future of our nation. In fact, this belief is part of our heritage. Our late founder, Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan once said, "Nothing could delight me more than to see the woman taking up her distinctive position in society ... Like men, women deserve the right to occupy high positions according to their capabilities and qualifications." He recognized that empowering women to realize their full potential would ensure the realization of the potential of the country as a whole.

I want to focus my comments here on three critical components of innovation- competency, motivation and chance . I strongly believe these three drivers are needed to provide both the capacity and incentives for innovation. I also want to focus on how the UAE is shaping these drivers in our country to ensure a primary role for women in innovation, particularly when it comes to clean energy and sustainable development.

First, for competency, education is required, **not only** to give young minds the tools, the skills and the capacity to innovate, **but also**, the creativity, the hunger, and the desire to seek innovative solutions. In the UAE we have invested heavily in education for innovation. We are seeing this investment pay *strong dividends, especially when it comes to women in innovation.*

In the UAE, the share of women in higher education is amongst the highest in the world. To take one example,

79% of students at UAE University are women.

Nevertheless, as is the case in many countries, women are often absent from the disciplines where innovation is largely driven—including science, technology, math and engineering. In response the UAE government is looking to bridge the gender gap in these areas. According to the UNDP report of 2010, UAE has got 65% of female graduates in science and technology and engineering.

The chance(recognition) comes from the country's green development strategy which provides the infrastructure for the implementation of all the programs.

In this regard, the Masdar Institute of Science and Technology was established in collaboration with MIT to provide qualified students in the region with the opportunity to obtain graduate degrees in the fields of renewable energy, sustainability, environment, water resources, systems engineering and management, and advanced materials. Masdar Institute boasts a high female enrolment compared to other institutions of its kind – 37 per cent – and within the Emirati student body, women are

a sizeable majority. And Masdar Institute is providing concrete opportunities for students to not only learn about clean energy and sustainability but to play an active role in developing the technologies of the future.

In this regard Mubadala Aerospace in Abudhabi of UAE, sponsored a historic program launched by the UAE-based Arab Youth Venture Foundation and NASA. This program was so unique because it was the first time non-US students were given the opportunity to do their internships at NASA. Over the years, the UAE has managed to create a strong infrastructure in the field of aerospace and is one that is under constant expansion.

The UAE wants women to become pioneers and innovators not only in our own society, but for the global community as a whole.

Accordingly, the UAE is engaged in a number of programs to empower women's active and equal participation to the green economy, including the Clean Energy Education and Empowerment (C3E) initiative under the Clean Energy Ministerial, which seeks to connect women to role models

around clean energy issues, and to support their career advancement. We hope that programs like these will create opportunities and support systems for students to empower them to take the lead on sustainable development innovation.

I would now like to turn briefly to the question of recognition. And I am glad to be doing so while sitting on this panel with distinguished recipients of the SEED Awards.

As the Secretary General of the Zayed Prize for the Environment, I have seen firsthand how such awards can recognize important achievements, and encourage future ones. Recipients of our award have included impressive women leaders on sustainable development who crossed our boundaries to include the regional and international , from Gro Brundtland of Norway, to Jane Lubchenco of the US, Yolanda Kakabadse of Ecuador, and Dr. Badria Al Awadi of Kuwait. In Addition, the inaugural Zayed Future Energy Prize was awarded to Dipal Barua, whose innovative solution to delivering solar power empowered

women in Bangladesh to bring the technology to 2 million people.

I would invite you all to nominate as many women leaders and innovators as you can for the Zayed International Prize for the environment and Zayed Future Energy Prize that reward innovation and sustainable development.

Although people thought approaching this innovation mission would be impossible, but it turned out in to be an incredible and very possible mission! So, think globally and act locally!

Let's make this a year of recognizing and rewarding women innovators, and in turn, inspiring young women by raising up their role models and demonstrating what can be achieved. In closing, I would like to thank you again for joining this important event. And, I would call on each of you, as potential innovators in your fields, to think how you can drive innovation, by women, for women, for the future women want. Thank you.

