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STATEMENT

by H.E. Ms. Ivana Pajević

Charge d'Affaires a. i. of the Mission of Montenegro to the UN,  
at the UN Women Multi-stakeholder forum Panel 3 on sustainable infrastructure for  
gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

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Excellencies,  
Distinguished representatives,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all know that addressing gender inequality and ensuring equal participation and opportunities for women and girls is central to achieving progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Our experience shows that without gender equality and the empowerment of women, countries cannot meet their full potential. Still, in most countries around the world, women continue to face high level of inequality in livelihood opportunities and daily challenges of access to economic assets, and face many forms of violence and discriminations.

As many studies show, women from poor and rural backgrounds, indigenous, Afro-descent and migrant women, women with disabilities, single women and single mothers are particularly affected by discrimination, abuse and neglect during childbirth. Poor households, rural populations and ethnic minorities often experience specific deprivations, from lower access to education, to decent housing, to clean energy, to water and sanitation. Stigma and discrimination form a common barrier to public service access.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the heart of 2030 Agenda is also the imperative to invest in sustainable infrastructure. Inadequate infrastructure is one of the most pervasive impediments to growth and sustainable development. However, infrastructure interventions do not automatically result in inclusive growth.

Gender remains a largely neglected aspect of infrastructure planning and provision, and a large number of infrastructure projects are gender blind. Gender-unaware interventions can adversely affect women and favor already privileged groups in a community. And this is something that requires urgent change.

As Vice-President and President of UN Women Executive Board, during field visits I was able to witness importance of many different projects of UN Women in Nepal, India, Uganda, Malawi, including a small scale UN-Women project of fruit juice factory in Malawi. The project was set up to create new jobs and provide women's access to markets in order to sustain their livelihood. However, due to the lack of basic infrastructure, they spent several hours fetching water. In the same way girls had to walk extremely long distances to attend schools. This is just an example why we need to build roads or improve electricity access, access to water, for improving gender equality. Making infrastructure gender responsive can be as simple as bringing safe piped water into or near homes or putting streetlights on roads. In this way we will ensure positive impact on women's mobility, enhance their access to education and health services, as well as markets and leading to higher paid jobs for women and new business opportunities.

Better infrastructure is an important priority with multiple benefits. Well-designed and gender-aware infrastructure projects and investments are needed to enhance access to safe drinking water and sanitation that improves conditions for girls' education enabling them to attend and stay longer in school. It is also critical for raising the productivity of women farmers, which in turn contributes to enhancing income and food security.

Dear colleagues,

Women have traditionally been underrepresented in the infrastructure workforce, and they are often excluded from infrastructure employment opportunities. We need to involve women in all phases of infrastructure projects, including decision making so that they can share their knowledge, advocate for their needs and rights and prioritize policies and action that are gender-inclusive. It is also important for women to break through gender barriers and enter traditionally male dominated sectors, as for example in the energy industry, construction business or transport sector.

Understanding and addressing gender related risks is critical to ensure infrastructure projects do not have negative impacts on women and girls. We need to enable safe, inclusive and well-planned public spaces, infrastructure, urban services, and transport. This way we will reduce violence and

harassment that women and girls face and increase access to economic opportunities.

With gender-aware infrastructure development we do not only increase women's opportunities and empowerment but also enhance project effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. That is why governments and other stakeholders should take this into account.

If we want to achieve sustained and inclusive economic growth and development, we need to have an integrated and systemic approach and we should spare no efforts to open real opportunities for women and girls. The key is our strong, full commitment and decisive action to achieve transformation demanded by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Thank you.