

## **Intersessional Expert Meeting on the full enjoyment of human rights by all women and girls and the systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda**

Madam Chair,

Promotion of gender equality, sustained through collective efforts to empower women and girls to play a lead role in decision making, is an integral part of the global vision for Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. The UN Commission on the Status of Women has addressed this important aspect comprehensively during its deliberations and outcomes in the recent past. Further, the Security Council has also emphasized the pivotal link between gender equality and international peace and security through its resolution 1325.

Gender mainstreaming and empowerment, therefore, remains as an important priority for both the UN system as well as for its Member States.

Secretary General Antonio Guterres highlighted this priority more eloquently in his message for the international women's day this year, and I quote *"Where women face discrimination, we often find practices and beliefs that are detrimental to all"* and *"Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals means progress for all women, everywhere"* I unquote.

Madam Chair,

We have arrived at an important juncture in human development where gender equality, economic advancement and peace and prosperity underpin the vision of a sustainable future that we all seek. Concerted, carefully thought through and targeted approaches geared to empowering women are an imperative for the effective advancement of development goals in national and international programmes.

It is important to work together to empower women and girls to contribute to the effective realization of SDGs and to help protect and uphold their human rights, thereby ensuring a dignified life and a better future for all women and girls. Their future is our future, and the future of the entire humanity.

It is incumbent on all stakeholders, Madam Chair, to strive to create a culture of respect for equality and non-discrimination and to work towards dispelling the myth of inferiority attributed to women over centuries.

The rise of hatred and extremism, that is often manifested in its ruthless forms in several areas of the world, feeds violent tendencies making women bear the brunt of discrimination and exclusion. While, in many societies, women have advanced in education and in other disciplines often breaking glass ceilings, there is hardly any convincing evidence that such progress is mirrored in corresponding progress towards effective amelioration of their vulnerabilities.

Women confront varying challenges, silently and alone. They suffer from multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization. During conflicts, more often than not,

they lose not just their voices but their dignity too comes under severe stress. It devolves on Governments as well as all stakeholders, to take targeted special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence and other forms of abuse.

We need to work across all segments of society as well as cultures, industries, businesses and communities to ensure women's progress and enhance their effective contribution towards economic development. This needs to be done in a manner that helps strengthen women, first and foremost.

Ensuring women's access to quality health services and quality education will significantly improve their life chances and better employment. When women can make their own decisions on all matters including those pertaining to economy and finance, their families prosper, and the entire community benefits from the dividends it yields. Such empowered women and girls can bring transformational improvements in the health and prosperity of families, communities, societies and nations they live in. But to achieve it is a shared responsibility.

Madam Chair,

Education has a significant impact, particularly in terms of gender-sensitive policies and frameworks, teacher training and recruitment, as well as ensuring that learning materials are free of gender stereotypes. Further the role of psychosocial support is not to be underestimated, particularly in shaping attitudes and unleashing talents. Such measures can greatly transform the uneven gender landscape observed in several countries, thereby helping to bring women to the forefront of national and international drive towards achieving sustainable development.

The entitlement and ability of women to make choices in a manner that self-empowers them is a key determinant of the overall health and resilience of societies. An important objective of sustainable development remains to be to create empowered societies which provide space for making independent choices and diminish prospects of stereotyping and stigmatization.

We believe that leaving out women and girls in development and in peace and security, is a *'loss for the world as it puts a damaging brake on progress towards sustainable development'*. It is necessary to take steps to reverse the course and to simultaneously invest in developing their potential and talent since women and girls cannot remain on the sidelines as implementation of the 2030 Agenda continues.

The low participation of women in labour markets as is observed in several countries today, requires appropriate policy interventions in addition to sensitization. A creative mix of targeted institutional, executive and legal measures as well as initiatives aimed at changing attitudes towards women and at increasing respect for diversity is in order. We must reckon that wider sociocultural and labour market preconceptions greatly affect career choices and perspectives among young women, especially with regard to the selection of their careers.

Madam Chair,

Sri Lanka has launched the National Action Plan to prevent gender based violence (GBV) which is currently under implementation. This, along with the National Human Rights Action Plan (2017-2021), that was evolved through a bottom up approach, are among several initiatives designed to address the challenges bearing upon the status of women and their welfare.

Further, the empowerment of women is among the foremost priorities that receives focused attention in the 2030 Sustainability Sri Lanka Strategy which is being finalised.

Women's representation in local government authorities in Sri Lanka has been minimal until early this year. The mandatory 25% quota for women introduced by law last year has increased their participation in policy and decision making in local government bodies. This, no doubt, assures them of an opportunity to transform themselves into leadership positions at provincial and national levels in the future.

These achievements need to be consolidated while endeavouring to further enhance the participation of women in key sectors of development and economy.

To conclude my intervention today, Madam Chair, let me reiterate that, achieving gender equality is not just an issue of women and girls; it goes way beyond, calling for the active involvement of all stakeholders.

I thank you.