

High-level Panel of the Regional Conference on Women in LAC “Gender Equality at the Centre of Sustainable Development”

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I would like to thank our host, the Government of Uruguay as well express my sincere appreciation for as they assume the Chairmanship of the Regional Conference on Women in LAC for the next three years.

The Regional Conference theme of “Gender equality, women’s autonomy and sustainable development” is very timely as this Regional Conference is the first to be held after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. It will provide the needed occasion for the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean to discuss and agree on a forward-looking document to guide the region’s efforts to ensure women’s rights, implementation of past agreements at the regional and global levels (including the Consensus adopted in the previous editions of the Conference) as well as forge the full, effective and accelerated gender-responsive SDG implementation.

Progress in positioning gender equality as a means and pre-condition for the achievement of sustainable development

The last 10 years have provided historic opportunities for positioning gender equality and the empowerment of women central in the international inter-governmental arena.

In Rio + 20, while Member States recognized that gender equality and women's empowerment were important for effective action on all aspects of sustainable development and the common future; they also reaffirmed their commitments to ensure women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making.

In the 20-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action, Member States recognized women’s voice, leadership, participation, and influence in decision-making had increased significantly worldwide, yet progress had been slow and uneven. In response, they have set 50/50 as a target and aiming for a critical mass of 33 per cent as the minimum representation of women in all political, public and economic decision-making bodies at all levels - global, regional, national and local.

The Political Declaration emanated from the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women emphasized therefore the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform as essential for achieving the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals and as key to tackling new challenges through a transformative post-2015 development agenda.

The Political Declaration defined six strategies that would contribute achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women, including strengthening the implementation of laws and policies, increasing support for institutional mechanisms for gender equality, transformation of social norms and gender stereotypes, increasing investment through domestic resource mobilization and official development assistance (ODA and other sources), strengthening accountability, and enhancing capacity building, data collection, monitoring and evaluation.

Last year, the historic gender equality compact adopted by all governments and placed at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with truly transformative, comprehensive and universal ambition, marked a systemic shift which was further strengthened by the Financing for development (AAAA outcome), 1325 Global Review on Women Peace and Security and the Paris agreement on climate change.

In the 2030 Agenda, gender equality was affirmed as a precondition and necessary outcome of sustainable development and was itself transformed into a sustainable development goal. The 2030 Agenda declared that justice for women and girls and their human rights matter because they constitute half of humanity and all must tap into the infinite potential of their empowerment.

Goal 5 on achieving—not just promoting—gender equality and empowering all women and girls, was promised to all women and girls in their diversity of circumstance and status. Its six targets address the structural barriers to women’s enjoyment of their human rights and assure physical integrity and security, voice and choice. These include:

- end all forms of discrimination in law and practice;
- eliminate violence against women and girls, including harmful practices;
- women’s equal participation and leadership at all levels of political; economic and public life;
- recognize and redistribute unpaid care work and provide public services, infrastructure and social protection; and

- ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

The 2030 Agenda also promoted women's economic rights and independence by calling for decent work, equal pay and equal rights, ownership and control over economic resources—such as land, property, technology and financial services.

SDG 5 and all other gender-sensitive targets in 11 other SDGs constitute a Gender Equality Compact that embraces the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW as a foundational framework for sustainable development, offering a real opportunity to drive lasting change for women's rights and equality.

Women's empowerment and autonomy as a guarantee for sustainable development, good governance and justice

The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status have gained recognition as essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life.

- **Evidence shows that countries with more women in parliament tend to have more equitable laws, social programmes and budgets that benefit women, children and families.**
- **The equal participation of women and men is a guarantee of sustainable development, good governance and justice.**
- Women's political leadership means greater attention to issues of health, education infrastructure, care services and social protection, ending violence against women (EVAW) and quality of life. In conflict and humanitarian situations too, women add value - durability of peace lasting 15 years by 35 per cent.
- The Quito Regional Conference called for parity to promote democracy, and the Montevideo Conference is a step towards that, in agreeing on parity democracy by 2030, in addition to the SDGs. Our call is for a model of democracy in which substantive equality and parity in all decision-making mechanisms in all areas of life, the economy, society, the environment, governance and culture.
- In Latin America and the Caribbean has expressed great commitment to work towards this end. Indeed, in the LAC region, five countries passed parity laws, women occupy 27.6 per cent of seats in parliaments and there

is 22.4 per cent of women ministers. Important progress has been made, but it is still far from parity.

- The launching of Parity Democracy requires an integral approach with far-reaching qualitative and quantitative changes in all areas, from governance and political participation to reconciliation and shared responsibility in healthcare and the economy, the elimination of violence against women, new masculinity, education and communication as values of equality between genders or the environment
- **Countries with greater gender equality have higher gross national product per capita.**
- In a McKinsey study on the Power of Parity in 95 countries it is estimated that there would be a 12-28 trillion GDP increase by 2025 with equal parity.
- Other studies are equally compelling. In India if young women are educated and join the formal economy - the GDP would increase by 25 percent!
- UN Women has supported many good practices for the economic empowerment of women in the region, for instance the National Integrated Care System of Uruguay which is an example for many other countries; or the increase of 50 per cent in recent years in contributions to social security and the 208 per cent increase in the hourly wage of domestic workers thanks to the programme, improving conditions for domestic workers.
- **There are also enormous benefits derived from women's empowerment and with forging gender parity in their decision-making bodies.** Studies have shown that companies with more women on their corporate boards outperform companies with fewer or no women directors. Yet the limited participation of women in decision-making in the private sector continues to be a major challenge to sustainable development.
- In the region, the Study before us has stressed the persistent limited participation of women in decision making at all levels, including in the economic governance. It emphasizes, for example, that only 7 of the 18 countries of Latin American region have a woman in the boards of the central banks. The participation of women in the corporate boards is less than 8 per cent and that only one company out of 72 of reference had a CEO woman.
- Almost like a gender-based caste system and hierarchy / segregation whereby women are confined to certain professions / roles / or lower positions within them continues in most countries.

- Women are also confined in most countries to the informal sector in vulnerable and precarious employment and livelihoods and in terms of entrepreneurship are relegated to micro, small and medium enterprises and related financing.
- At the present pace it will take atleast 80 years to achieve parity - so we need an acceleration and leapfrogging strategy.
- Therefore, despite recognizing progress in advancing the gender equality goal, there are still important gaps that continue to challenge the achievement of sustainable peace and development.

The strategy towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls

- In the Agreed Conclusions adopted by the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 60) last March, Member States set out a **road map** for the gender-responsive implementation of all the SDGs and Agenda 2030. I would like to stress here some to those key recommendations which I hope will guide today's discussion.
- **First step: Understand the extent of gender disparity in economic, political and public life.**
- There needs to be a value chain of knowledge, data generation and use, and monitoring of progress.
- It is critical to consolidate a radical shift in the availability, accessibility, analysis and use of gender statistics through the development of new methodologies, increased capacity of national statistical offices and better coordination amongst partners at global, regional and national levels.
- UN Women is working with partners to make this gender data revolution happen. Building the national and local statistical capacity to bridge the gender gap as the test to measure the political resolve to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and make real impact on the lives of women and girls.

Second step: Understand and address the structural reasons why there is such overwhelming disparity, inequality and slow progress.

Culture, religion, custom, tradition - gender stereotypes are perpetuated intergenerationally, encrustations of gendered power relations / structures

and patriarchy and division of labour, authority and role play over centuries are difficult to remove.

Politics and corporate worlds have become "masculine spaces" into which women are allowed in as a grace, not their right.

Misperceptions persist that empowering women and their assuming leadership positions in politics and the economy is about taking away power from men (feminists caricatured as men haters and the quest for gender equality portrayed as a power struggle). It is about interrogating if not destroying traditional, male dominated notions of family and women's caregiver and reproductive roles, and realizing and perpetuating more inclusive familial and individual roles for both men and women in relation to society, economy, politics, governance, property rights and ownership and control over resources, control over their bodies, SRHR, violence.

The "duty" and burden of unpaid care work and domestic work is another important factor holding back women from gender parity in political and economic leadership (see our report on Transforming Economies Realizing Rights).

Hence this agenda is politically challenged, economically resisted and culturally contested almost everywhere.

Demolishing such structural barriers of the mind in society and households, the conscious and unconscious bias in institutions requires creating a new narrative and paradigm.

Third: Raise awareness and provoke outrage - that's what our feminist leaders have been doing over the last 100 years.

It is the 21st century's exclusion and marginalization from decision-making of half of world's population must be ended. It is the last civil rights frontier to be conquered. (the Pope called the wage gap - pure scandal).

But the scale and scope of the advocacy effort has to be unprecedented and of epic proportions in all countries and in all political, economic, social and media spaces.

We need powerful campaigns, and all must join and become feminists.

Women and girls - and we must start young - men and boys, women's movement, youth, FBOs, private sector, CSOs for development

environment, humanitarian, and human rights and the UN System must embrace and follow the Planet 50/50 by 2030 playbook.

Cultural relativism used to deny their true democratic or human rights and "keep women in their place" - at home and away from claiming their human rights in public and political decision-making spheres and the productive economy has to be deconstructed and the political, public and economic policy space reclaimed for and by women of all ages.

Four the value proposition: Recognition of the value proposition of gender parity in political, public and economic life and leadership of, by and for women is essential.

It is about gender justice, human rights, moral and ethical imperative, upholding the democratic, gender equality, non-discrimination principle.

It is about representing the special needs and interests, but also deploying the talent and resources of half of humanity not just a minority or vulnerable group.

Public and private institutions must become more representative and accountable, in order to bring about the transformation that we seek. Our aim should be consolidating safer, inclusive, stable and cohesive societies. It is good for women and girls - empowers them, gives them autonomy, helps realize their rights and full potential, frees them from violence and subjugation. Yet, as many countries have proved, harnessing the power of gender parity is the smart thing to do - a no brainer as Amartya Sen put it, for the household, community, society and economy.

Five: How to create the enabling environment, as set out in the Beijing Platform for Action and CSW 60, but also in several resolutions of UN General Assembly and further elaborated in the outcome of CSW 59 on the political and economic empowerment of women. --- 6 strategies defined by CSW-60----

A. On the supply side

- Gender mainstreaming of all policies and strategies will help, but also should target and include women's equal representation and balance requirements in health, education, rural development, urban development, sports etc. Gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEWE) commitments and gender policies adopted by governments and the private sector are important guides and must be monitored and accountability fixed. For the latter the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) is a tool,

but more mandatory systems to begin with are required such as incentives and disincentives.

- Private and public institutions at all levels in all sectors should mandate and require time bound gender parity strategies, goals, targeting and work to their achievement. Quotas and other special measures for recruitment and promotion are required and special provisions for retention and pathways to leadership and management roles facilitated, including care services / parental leave policies, etc.
- Culture change and "conscience revolution" required in politics and economics – theory, practice and institutions. Undertake introspection and cleansing of bias and bring a positive bias and habit of gender balance. Gender balance literacy and education of the electorate, political parties, academia, corporate world and media important.

B. On the demand side:

- In education, mental and emotional conditioning, skills development and capacity-building of girls, young women and women of all ages they must be prepared to participate in politics and corporate life and assume leadership.
- We must not give excuses for not having a pipeline of female talent and the ability to assume their rightful place.
- Mentoring is important too by successful women and men.
- Fostering and supporting women's movement and leadership in civil society including young women's organizations and as a nursery of thought leadership and policy analysis, advocacy and activism on gender parity and as support to governments and private sector is crucial.
- Men and boys CSOs in support of gender balance and champions of GEWE are necessary.

Overall, political and financial investment in both the supply and demand sides of the gender balance and parity project is critical. **Ending chronic underinvestment and neglect is urgent.** Transformative financing - significantly increased investment - gender mainstreamed and responsive is essential.

Conclusion:

Gender parity is not only about recognizing the equal humanity of women in leading the world to the future we want and need. It is about tapping the enormous potential of women and girls' agency and talent that the governments and economies of the world are depriving themselves of by keeping them from equal participation and leadership in all matters.

Women's empowerment and autonomy is a force multiplier for good governance and democracy, economic growth, poverty eradication, ending hunger and achieving food security and nutrition, achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns and environmental sustainability, and SDG achievement overall.

I would like to take the opportunity to invite all Ministers and National Delegations to participate in the preparatory process for CSW 61, notably in the LAC Regional Consultations, tentatively scheduled to take place in Panama in late January 2017. The **priority theme of CSW 61 is "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work"**.

Besides this, the Commission will consider the **review theme "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls"** and will also consider the **emerging issue "Empowerment of indigenous women"**. All of them are very relevant topics that deserve the maximum attention from **civil society and governments**. So, I encourage strong **participation from you** as well as the inclusion of strong gender equality advocates from diverse civil society groups such as women's rights groups, youth and civil society organizations, indigenous, disability and other social justice groups in the delegations.

Shared responsibility and shared leadership is the need of the hour.

Women's place is in the world of decision-making and we do and we can make the difference that the world needs in order to achieve sustainable development, peace and security, and human rights.

Thank You.