

**Statement for the first session of the meeting of the open working  
group of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

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I would like to thank the Co-Chairs for giving UN Women the opportunity to speak today. I would like to focus my remarks on the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment in advancing sustainable development. This has to be prominently reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals.

In Rio last June, Member States have recognized that gender equality and the empowerment of women are drivers for sustainable development in all three dimensions – economic, environmental and social. They underscored women's vital role in achieving sustainable development.

The Rio+20 outcome document, which serves as the basis for the elaboration of SDGs, commits Member States to ensuring women's equal rights, access, participation and leadership in the economy, society, political decision-making and resource allocation.

As you know, the Rio+20 document contains a dedicated section with commitments on Gender equality and Women's empowerment. In addition, it also includes explicit references to women's empowerment and gender equality in twelve other thematic areas : poverty eradication; food security

and nutrition and sustainable agriculture; energy; water and sanitation; sustainable cities and human settlements; health and population; promoting full and productive employment; decent work for all and social protection; oceans and seas; small island developing States; disaster-risk reduction; desertification, land degradation and drought; and education.

This is an important foundation to build on in the work of the Open Working Group and a firm basis for the inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment in the development of Sustainable Development Goals and the future development framework.

I would like to reiterate two points that we heard from yesterday's deliberations and which UN Women strongly supports: first, the need for an inclusive and people-centered sustainable development; and second, the persistence of inequalities which must be urgently addressed.

Having women's rights and gender equality at the core of sustainable development goals discussions responds to and contributes to the realization of an inclusive, people-centered and equitable sustainable development.

Today, we have ample evidence that gender equality is a MUST to alleviate poverty, reduce inequalities, and drive progress on all Millennium Development Goals. After a century of progress and change, it is clear that in societies where women are empowered and their rights are protected and fulfilled, governance and participation are stronger, economies are more developed, and peace is sustainable.

The various processes related to the post-2015 development framework have also emphasized that priority must be given to gender equality and women's empowerment in the new development agenda. For example, this has been featured prominently in the results of the survey of Member States that was circulated to you by the UN Secretariat. It also came out loud and clear from consultations on inequalities. And we are confident that the High-Level Panel on Post-2015 will make this one of their main recommendations. The UN Secretary General has included "working with and for women" as well as sustainable development among its five generational priorities.

Yet to this day, the most blatant discrimination and abuse continues to be against women – be it at home, in the workplace, in the society and in the wider international arena. Women's contribution to society, the economy and the environment has remained untapped and disregarded for too many years. Women are far from enjoying equal rights, equal opportunities and equal participation and leadership with men. And this exclusion, this discrimination and this violence based on gender is one of the biggest obstacles that we face in advancing sustainable development.

Gender equality and women's empowerment must therefore feature prominently as a stand-alone goal, with comprehensive and transformative targets and indicators that capture the three dimensions of sustainable development.

At the same time, gender considerations should be mainstreamed in all other goals through the inclusion of specific targets and sex-disaggregated indicators for all relevant SDGs. This will not only help advance gender equality, it will in fact provide a better basis for the achievement of all goals. Again, I am pleased to note that in your deliberations yesterday, this point was also underscored.

For example, a potential SDG on water should include targets and indicators on women's participation in water governance, the alleviation of their work burden, and the availability of infrastructures and services that are responsive to women's needs and conditions. These are necessary conditions to ensure that a goal on water is achieved.

This will reflect the fact that women's empowerment is an important end in itself, but it is also instrumental and indeed essential for the achievement of sustainable development.

The Open Working Group has great challenge before it, but it can draw contributions from many stakeholders. UN Women is a member of the UN Technical Support Team to the Open Working Group. And together with the rest of the UN system, we look forward to providing support to you.

I wish you much success in the work ahead of you.

Thank you.