



**Speech of Michelle Bachelet
Executive Director of UN Women
United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

**“Advancing Women’s Political Participation”
19 September 2011
New York**

Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Friends and Colleagues,

Just a year ago, I participated in the General Assembly as the newly appointed Executive Director of UN Women and Under-Secretary-General. It was a time of enormous excitement and hope, personally for me, and for millions of women around the world in the quest to advance women’s empowerment and gender equality.

Representing this vision is my promise and my responsibility in the name of all women; in the name of our mothers and grandmothers, our daughters and granddaughters, and to pass on to future generations.

In the past nine months since UN Women entered into force, I have visited more than 20 countries in all regions of the world. I have met women from all cultures, and social and economic realities. They shared the belief that gender equality and women’s empowerment is a fight that is worth seeing through, and they realize that we have a long road ahead of us. But they are convinced that we are on the right track and that gender equality will only be possible with the solidarity of both women and men. This solidarity does not arise suddenly, but must be learned, and built through the sharing of everyday tasks and responsibilities within our homes, in our communities, in public and civic life and in the corridors of power.

It is a solidarity that is indispensable for building equality, well-being and peace in all societies and for achieving democracy. And it is a solidarity and commitment within the United Nations system for which we are accountable.

It is a solidarity that we see represented here today among this important group of women around me. We are bound by a common goal—to open the way for women to participate in all decisions affecting not only their lives, but the development of our world, at the global, regional, national and local levels. By making full use of half the world’s intelligence - the intelligence of women—we improve our chances of finding real and lasting solutions to the challenges that confront us.

In the history of humankind there are key moments that enable breakthroughs unimaginable just a short time ago. Today we find ourselves in one of those moments for gender equality and women's rights. Just as a bird needs two wings to fly, a society needs women and men leading together to evolve to a higher level. We now have data to show that countries with greater gender equality have higher gross national product per capita, and that women's leadership in the corporate sector results in improved business performance.

In June, I visited Egypt and Tunisia and met with women's groups and others to support the transition to democracy. The Arab Spring has demonstrated to the world that women from all of the countries where protests occurred are prepared and determined to fight for democracy by and for the people. They came out to protest with men for better living conditions, equality, and political systems that genuinely represent the public. They now want to remain at the forefront of these political processes that will determine their future and the future of their countries. And the message is loud and clear: There is no turning back. In every country and in every region, in times of peace, conflict or transition, women want their voices to be heard. They want to exercise their rights and they want a seat at the decision-making table, and we will be supporting them in these efforts:

As Executive Director of UN Women and a former Head of State, my vision is for the future, and my heart is with the world's women. We are UN Women and together with the rest of the UN system and partners around the world, we will continue to empower women and girls and keep pushing until violence and discrimination against girls and women are no longer common or accepted, and all women and girls enjoy equal opportunities, rights and equal participation and leadership.

I thank you.