

Statement to the First Regular Session of the Executive Board, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
24 January 2011

Statement by Ms. Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director,

Madame President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Thank you, Madame President for giving me the opportunity to address this first meeting of the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and to present to you my vision and action plan for the first 100 days. Allow me to extend congratulations to members of the Executive Board who were elected on 10 November 2010 and in particular to those elected to the Executive Board Bureau on 22 December, namely:

Ambassador Joy Ogwu, Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations, President of the Executive Board Bureau; and Vice Presidents Mr. Zahid Rastam, Counselor, Permanent Mission of Malaysia; Ms. Olha Kavun, 2nd Secretary, Permanent Mission of Ukraine; Ms. Carmen Arias, 1st Secretary, Permanent Mission of Peru; and Mr. Magnus Lennartsson, Minister for Economic and Social Affairs, Permanent Mission of Sweden. I welcome the support you have shown for UN Women and look forward to working closely with all of you in the months ahead.

Madame President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

In the four months that I have been Executive Director of UN Women, I have been meeting with and listening to our many constituencies, including Member States, women's rights advocates and other civil society voices, and colleagues in the many parts of the United Nations system. What you have told me is that to deliver on our commitments to gender equality and women's rights, and meet the high expectations of constituents around the world, we need to be ambitious. But – we have to balance ambition with “common sense” — and ensure that we are building an organization that is robust and sustainable.

The messages I have heard are that UN Women must focus on a few issues, and achieve visible results; we must work in partnership with the UN system, not in competition; we must build on what we have achieved, but at the same time do even better, and we must think outside the box. Most importantly, we must prioritize support to national partners at country level. There are basic support services that countries and the UN system expect us to provide, and we must strengthen our capacity to provide them.

In this context, I have developed a Vision and 100 Day Action Plan to guide our work while we elaborate the priorities and results that will inform UN Women's Strategic Plan, which I look forward to developing with your strong guidance and support.

Vision and 100 Day Action Plan

I am reminded daily of the potential inherent in every member of society — men and women, girls and boys. I have seen myself that when afforded the opportunity, there is no limit to what women can do, from mothers who support their families in the hardest of circumstances, to women who become ministers of finance, foreign affairs, or heads of state. Women's strength, women's industry, women's wisdom are humankind's greatest untapped resource. The challenge then for UN Women is to show our diverse constituencies how this resource can be effectively tapped in ways that benefit us all.

Tapping this potential involves bringing women into decision making and creating space for their leadership; it involves freeing women from gender-based violence and providing the avenues and opportunities for them to be recognized as economic actors and included in economic policymaking; it involves showing policymakers that where women fully contribute to their economies and societies, the gains for everyone are greatly increased.

I am determined that UN Women will be a catalyst for change, offering new energy, drawing on long-standing ideas and values, and bringing together men and women from different countries, societies and communities in

a shared endeavour. I want to underline that this endeavour will be a global one, though its impact will be experienced primarily at the country level; thus UN Women's technical support and expertise will be available, on request, to all countries, developed and developing countries alike.

UN Women's vision is one where men and women have equal opportunities and capacities and the principles of gender equality are embedded in development, peace and security agendas. Our key objective is to build national capacity and ownership to enable national partners to formulate gender-responsive laws and policies and to scale up successful strategies to deliver on national commitments to gender equality.

To meet this objective, UN Women will centre its work around five core principles: 1) providing demand-driven support to national partners to enhance implementation of international agreements and standards; 2) supporting intergovernmental processes to strengthen the global normative and policy framework on gender equality; 3) advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment, championing the rights of women and girls — particularly those who are most excluded; 4) leading and promoting coherence in UN system work on gender equality; and 5) acting as a global broker of knowledge and experience, aligning practice with normative guidance.

Behind this vision is a strategic approach to leadership that is central to how we will work. There will be some areas where countries will look to UN Women to lead. However, there will also be many areas that impact women's lives where others are already doing excellent work, and with whom we will form strong partnerships, bringing attention to the gender dimensions which may be overlooked.

And there will be still other issues of great importance, where we can add most value by ensuring the work of the UN system is coherent on gender equality through our coordination role. If we play our UN system coordination role well, we can have a major impact on women's lives, without being operational in all areas.

Therefore, bearing in mind specific country contexts and capacities, UN Women will focus on five thematic priorities:

- 1) Expanding women's voice, leadership and participation, working with partners to close the gaps in women's leadership and participation in different sectors and to demonstrate the benefits of such leadership for society as a whole;
- 2) Ending violence against women by enabling states to set up the mechanisms needed to formulate and enforce laws, policies and services that protect women and girls, promote the involvement of men and boys, and prevent violence;
- 3) Strengthening implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, through women's full participation in conflict resolution and peace processes, gender-responsive early-warning, protection from sexual violence and redress for its survivors in accordance with UN resolutions;
- 4) Enhancing women's economic empowerment is particularly important in the context of global economic and environmental crises. UN Women will work with governments and multilateral partners to ensure the full realization of women's economic security and rights, including to productive assets and full social protection;
- 5) Making gender equality priorities central to national, local and sectoral planning and budgeting; working with partners, UN Women will support national capacities in evidence-based planning, budgeting and statistics.

In addition to these five priority areas, UN Women will support UN partners who are leading the response in areas such as HIV and AIDS, migration, the Rule of Law, environmental degradation and climate change, social protection, and maternal and child health.

UN Women has identified a number of actions over the next three months which are fully outlined in the Summary Vision and 100 Day Action Plan you have all received. Let me highlight just a few:

To promote UN System coherence, we will work with the UN Development Group (UNDG) to develop a UNDG coordination strategy on gender, and to adopt and implement a gender resource tracking system, building on work by the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

To expand women's voice, leadership and participation, we will partner with the Global Colloquium of Universities on an initiative called "Empowering women to change the world — what Universities and the UN can do." We will continue to provide grants — US\$16 million in the coming months — to government and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners to advance women's political and economic empowerment.

To combat violence against women, we will continue to work closely with other UN agencies and departments such as the UN Population Fund (UNFPA); we will link our Safe Cities for Women programme with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Safe Cities for Children initiative, to create synergies in our combined efforts to empower local authorities, and the efforts of women's and youth groups, to combat violence against women and girls in public places.

To strengthen the women, peace and security agenda, we will lead the development of a Strategic Framework for UN system implementation of UNSCR 1325 in partnership with UN entities and support further development of indicators to measure progress. Together with the Department of Political Affairs, we will support women in peace negotiations, increase numbers of senior women mediators and gender experts, and finalize guidance for mediators. With the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), we will test innovative pre-deployment training for peacekeeping troops.

To enhance women's economic empowerment, UN Women will work closely with partners (UNDP, FAO, ILO and IFIs) to develop a transformative UN strategy to advance women's economic empowerment with a special focus on rural women. Together with the World Bank, we will also regularly produce a global "Women's Economic Opportunity Index."

To advance gender equality priorities in development planning, budgets and statistics, working together with ILO, we will broaden the UN–European Commission Partnership focusing on Financing for Gender Equality at national level. We will partner with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to provide technical expertise where countries request help to link monitoring with actions to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Resources

Critical to our ability to provide strategic and sustainable policy and technical support to countries is the availability and reliability of financial resources. UN Women will also mobilize political and financial support for work on gender equality as a whole, including by UN partners.

We will accelerate our partnerships and resource mobilization efforts as part of our 100 day Action Plan. Relying on the long-standing partnerships with Member States, we will encourage predictable multi-year pledges, to mobilize at least 50 percent of our core support annually. I urge you to show your continued strong support for gender equality by assisting UN Women to meet its resource target.

In all of these areas, partnerships are essential. We will expand partnerships with the private sector, foundations and individuals, including through new electronic giving and internet campaigns. Recognizing that much of our work will be to stimulate and support others to do what needs to be done, we will build partnerships with governments and civil society, with parliamentarians and community based leaders, targeting groups that are most excluded, including HIV positive women, women in minority groups, women with disabilities, informal women workers and rural or urban poor women. UN Women's research and training agenda will depend upon strong partnerships with academia, think tanks and research centres. This approach will be fully reflected in our Strategic Plan, which we will bring to you at the annual session in June. The process of preparing this plan will provide important opportunities to continue our dialogue with Member States, and within the UN system, on how we can best add value.

As part of consultations for the UN Women Strategic Plan, I plan to visit all the regions in which we work during the first quarter of 2011 to hear from governments, civil society and UNCTs and to meet with women at all levels. I will also appoint an NGO Advisory Group to advise me as Executive Director, through which

NGOs can share their perspectives, expertise and knowledge and provide a channel for our ongoing collaboration.

Madame President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

UN Women will be formally launched on 24 February 2011 during the 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). We will invite influential men, women and youth from all regions to join us and to remain engaged, challenging the perception that gender equality only concerns women.

The CSW provides an opportunity to support Member States and civil society partners to translate commitments and recommendations into concrete actions, and determine how UN Women can effectively advance such actions.

UN Women will also engage in other important inter-governmental processes, including current preparations for the 4th Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDC-IV) in 2011 and for the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio + 20), highlighting the importance of women's economic empowerment in addressing persistent poverty and exclusion, particularly in the case of rural women.

Madame President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates

The establishment of UN Women prioritizes a strengthened country presence. Currently this presence ranges from non-resident implementing agency to resident entity with full programme interventions. UN Women currently has invested in staff and personnel, as well as country-level programming in 78 countries. In many countries, UN Women representation is based not in country but in sub-regional offices. The majority of staffing at country level consists of project-funded posts oriented to specific projects. As a result, existing capacity to meet the functions of UN Women at country level is uneven.

To see a notable difference in the UN system's delivery at country level, UN Women must have relevant and capable teams of experts where the needs are greatest. I have initiated a Field Capacity Assessment to identify gaps in UN Women capacity to assist national partners and UNCTs, and will use the findings to address the most serious of these gaps in 2011 at country level. The Field Capacity Assessment, which will be completed in mid-February, is informed by a partner survey with over 1000 responses from over 60 countries, field missions and partner consultations, and a desk review of internal and external evaluations. The Capacity Assessment is also expected to outline "Standard models of support" that national partners expect at the country level, based on General Assembly resolution 64/289, and to determine the minimum capacity needs to enable UN Women to deliver this support.

An initial finding of the Field Capacity Assessment is a consistent call for support in five areas. These are: 1) capacity development and technical support for development, implementation and monitoring national policies and programmes; 2) knowledge acquisition and sharing; 3) improved accountability for gender equality commitments, both national and international; 4) empowering national actors as effective advocates; and 5) leading UN coordination on gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Field Capacity Assessment identifies functions needed to meet these requests and will propose minimum capacities to address the gaps, including: 1) the need for appropriate institutional arrangements, 2) the need for "start-up" programme resources, 3) minimum staff resources for UN Women country presence; and 4) required staff profiles, addressing additional competencies and skills needed.

Using the results of the Capacity Assessment, we will propose as part of the Strategic Plan, minimum capacities for countries in which UN Women now has various types of presence. We will develop a plan for a phased strengthening of field capacity over the coming years, based on priority national needs and demand, existing UN Women and UN Country Team capacity in each country, including the existence of dedicated gender expertise among other UN partners in country and whether there is presence of a peacekeeping operation.

Madame President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates

The “transition” on which UN Women has embarked from the old to the new is a complex one, in which we are working outside of the logical sequence, and without the full required capacity. But gradually we are assembling the capacities we need to become the Entity envisioned in the founding resolution. In the four months that I have been Executive Director, we have submitted two budgets; we have developed a new structure for headquarters staff, and are completing the alignment of the existing staff to the new structure. We have secured our new home and migrated our business functions into one common computer system, Atlas. We have initiated the Field Capacity Assessment, and started the Strategic Planning process. And we have continued to support all of the ongoing programmatic commitments of the four entities while this transformation is taking place.

However, there is much more to be done. I do not have my senior management team in place. Our staff are not yet able to sit together in their new work units to start the real “institutional cultural change” that we are expected to generate. And there are requests for support at the country level to which we do not always have the capacity to respond.

I am very aware that we are coming to you with a first Support Budget for UN Women in a less than ideal situation. Ideally, decisions on resources from both the UN Regular Budget and Support Budget would be driven by the Strategic Plan and the Field Capacity Assessment.

However, we do not have the luxury of waiting until these are completed. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) report was very helpful, and we have now issued our management response — which you, Madame President, have been kind enough to share with Executive Board members last Thursday. In our management response we have identified immediate steps for strengthening our ability to support countries that can be approved without prejudging your decisions on the Strategic Plan.

These measures aim to achieve four objectives: 1) immediately create the senior management structure required for UN Women to build the new organization; 2) start the process to strengthen and improve operational activities in 15 of the countries where we are working; 3) strengthen our ability to support national partners in other countries, including developed countries, from our regional support hubs and sub-regional offices; and 4) provide a small number of key posts to address critical gaps in our capacity at Headquarters. The cost of this proposal for 2011 is US\$51.5 million. I will brief you on the progress we are making in implementing this budget when I present our Strategic Plan in June, and I understand that I have the option of presenting a further revision to the 2011 Support Budget in June if we find it necessary. I hope that I can count on your support.

Madame President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

In closing, let me say that these first four months have been an extraordinary time for me. I am overwhelmed with the warm reception and support I have received, from the many constituencies that helped bring UN Women into being. At the same time I am acutely aware of both the results that are expected of UN Women, and the challenges we face in meeting them. Nevertheless, meet them we will. That is why I welcome this opportunity to speak to this first meeting of the UN Women Executive Board. I know that with your support, your advice and your guidance, we will succeed.