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UN Women Executive Director calls for an end to harmful cultural practices against women and girls



UN Women Africa Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Director Christine Musisi; Mrs Yoo Soon-taek, wife of Ban Ki-Moon; UN Women Executive Director Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and UN Women Representative to AU, UNECA and Ethiopia Letty Chiwara. Photo Credit: UN Women/ Abraham Gebremeskel

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—From 29 to 31 January 2015, UN Women’s Executive Director and UN Under-Secretary General Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka visited Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to participate in the 24th Ordinary Session of the African Union Summit. The Summit saw the adoption of Agenda 2063 by Heads of States and the launching of the 2015 theme, “2015 the Year of Women’s Empowerment and Development towards

Africa’s Agenda 2063”, by the elected chair of the African Union H.E. Robert Mugabe, the President of Zimbabwe.

Before the Official Opening of the 24th Ordinary Session of Heads of States at the African Union Summit, the Executive Director participated in a high-level breakfast meeting to bring attention to the issues of early and child marriage. Stakeholders showed collective commit-

ment and responsibility to protect children and to address the linkages between the rights of the child, health (emotional and physical) and an overall problem for development which has to be addressed before 2063. “We have to end all practices that are negative for our societies and our continent” said H.E. Idriss Déby, President of Chad.

UN Women ED calls for an end to harmful cultural practices-continued



UN Women Executive Director Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka meets with representatives from the African Queens and Women Cultural Leaders Network in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for the 24th AU Summit. #women4agenda2063 Photo credit: UN Women/ Abraham Gebremeskel

The Executive Director also met with the Ethiopia Civil Society Advisory Group as well as members of the West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) and Eastern and Southern Africa (ESARO) Civil Society Advisory Groups (CSAGs) to discuss the role of CSAGs on the continent. She also met with representatives from the African Queens and Women Cultural Leaders Network. The meeting highlighted the role of traditional leaders in promoting a change of mindsets towards ending harmful cultural practices against women and girls.

Considering the promotion of young women as a priority for the implementation of Agenda 2063, the Executive Director also met with a delega-

tion of young women who participated in the AU Summit.

During her mission the Executive Director participated in the Official Opening of UN Women Office with the Head of Agencies of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), the UN Resident Coordinator and the wife of the UN Secretary General, Mrs Yoo Soon-taek.

As a follow up to the Gender Pre-Summit and the request for the establishment of a Special Fund for Women, the Executive Director participated in a high-level discussion on the development of a Special Fund for Women. During the meeting it was emphasized by various stakeholders that the need to steer more resources towards women's organizations and women's issues which includes financing for the implementa-

tion of women's rights frameworks. The meeting resulted in the establishment of a core team that will support the development of the Fund and which will present some analysis on the structure by the June Summit. As a member of the Secretary General's (SGs) delegation to the AU Summit, Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngucka also took part in the SG's program which included the official SG press briefing as well as meetings with Head of States.

The ED also used her presence in Ethiopia to promote the HeforShe Campaign on the continent and had top decision makers join the movement including H.E. Peter Mutharika, President of Malawi as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs from Sierra Leone, amongst others.

Male African leaders join the HeForShe campaign



Paramount Chief Kyungu signs the HeForShe Solidarity banner
Photo credit: UNWomen/Ruth Waiganjo

Nairobi, Kenya—Paramount Chief Kyungu an influential cultural leader of Malawi and Gilberto Macuacua, a media personality in Mozambique, who is also a member of the UN Women Regional Civil Society Group (RCSAG) for Eastern and Southern Africa, have signed on as male supporters of UN Women's HeForShe campaign, calling on other men to follow suit. Ron Archer, a renowned transformative leadership coach from the United States of America also joined them.

The three led by example by signing up on the online platform during a HeForShe gala dinner in Nairobi, Kenya on 10 February, the first regional event of its kind in Africa. The event was attended by Ambassador Sahle Work-Zwede, the Director General, United Nations Office in Nairobi; Christine Musisi, UN Women Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa; and Zebib Kavuma, UN Women Kenya Country Director.

Promising to harness the power of cultural leaders to bring about change, Paramount Chief Kyungu, promised to embark on a campaign to encourage all men in his country to be-

come champions of gender equality and women's empowerment.

"The cultural leaders in Malawi have been on the forefront of discouraging cultural practices that infringe on the rights of women, such as early marriages, and will continue to do so," he said.

In addition to the online sign-up during the event, men also signed a banner pledging their solidarity in advocating for gender equality. They were given HeForShe badges to wear on their lapels.

"The media is a powerful tool in shaping opinion and I use the TV programme of Homem que é Homem (Men that are real men) as well as my blog <http://gilbertomacuacua.blogspot.com> to talk about issues of gender equality and fighting violence against women," said Gilberto Macuacua.

A 25-year-old Kenyan poet, Mufasa, composed and recited a moving poem titled, "HeForShe" in which he spoke about the abuses women go through and what men can do to advocate for gender equality and women's empow-



UN Women Kenya Country Director Zebib Kavuma (left) and Regional Director Christine Musisi at the HeForShe event.
Photo Credit: UNWomen/Ruth Waiganjo

erment. He says his poem was inspired by the struggles of his mother as she single-handedly raised him and three siblings, with very little income.

"Women should be protected and valued and there should be zero tolerance of using women as sex objects. We need to celebrate strong women; the stronger the woman, the stronger the man," said Mr. Archer.

These men join the thousands of African men who have already signed on to this global UN Women initiative, to which more than 200,000 men have already committed. Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, and renowned Malian musician Salif Keita endorsed the campaign last November. And in January, the President of Senegal, Macky Sall, and of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma, joined global leaders in launching IMPACT 10X10X10, a one-year pilot effort under the HeForShe campaign that aims to engage governments, corporations and universities as instruments of change to galvanize momentum in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.



Paramount Chief Kyungu, Gilbert Macuacua and Ron Archer
Photo Credit: UNWomen Ruth Waiganjo

Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General of the East African Model United Nations sign up as HeForShe Champions



*EAMUN Secretary General, Viraj Shah (right) with Deputy Secretary General, Rohan Singer
Photo credit: EAMUN*

Nairobi, Kenya—The Secretary General of the East African Model United Nations (EAMUN), Viraj Shah and the Deputy Secretary General, Rohan Singer, today signed up as HeForShe Champions during the ongoing EAMUN conference that is taking place at the United Nations Complex in Nairobi.

The two read out

their commitment to fight against violence and discrimination faced by women and girls before going online to sign up as male champions.

The Model UN simulates the activities of the real United Nations Organization and aims to build up the confidence and enhance the debate skills of all the participants. The East African Model United Nations program consists of students aged between 14 to 19 years.

The participants of the EAMUN Conference were drawn from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Malawi, as well as from countries from other regions such as India and Sweden.

During the conference, UN Women made a presentation of the HeForShe campaign and called upon the students to become champions for gender equality by signing up for the HeForShe campaign and also to engage in other activities such as following and contributing on the HeForShe social media platforms as well as introducing their friends and relatives to the campaign.

Close to 50 male champions signed up on the online platform with many others promising to do so and also to spread the message to others.



EAMUN Secretary General Viraj Shah signing online as a HeForShe Champion.

Photo credit: UN Women/Simone ellis Oluoch-Olunya

Tanzanian Women and Youth Empowered to Strengthen their Leadership



Women and youth participating in the training held in Kyela on 18 December 2014 Photo credit: UN Women/Stephanie Raison

Kyela, Tanzania—When people come to the Mirambo home in southern Tanzania asking to speak with the Honorable, they are asked if they wish to see the big Honorable or the less big Honorable? If it is the big Honorable then it is Ms Anna Mirambo, District Councillor for Itope District. The not so big Honorable is her husband, Mr Julius Mirambo, Village Chairperson for Magereza sub-village. Ms Mirambo shared her successes and challenges as a woman leader at a training session in Kyela District for women and youth leaders organized by Tanzania Women Cross Party Platform (T-WCP-Ulingo), supported

by UN Women and DEP.

Women and young people from a wide range of political parties, came from across the country from Iringa Town, Mafinga, Kyela, Mbarali, Ikwiriri Districts to participate and share their views. Altogether some 180 women and youth leaders attended the training sessions on leadership skills, gender equality and democracy. They also shared successes and challenges faced by women and young people who wish to stand for nomination as electoral candidates.

“There are many challenges that women candidates face such as lack of resources as well as discouragement

even from other women who are competing for limited special seats posts,” said Ms Zuhura Omary, who has served twice on special seats as Councillor in Kyela and Chairperson of CCM Women’s Wing in Kyela, a town near the Tanzania-Malawi Border.

Fundraising tactics, campaign strategies as well as leadership skills were some one of the issues during the T-WCP training workshops across the country and women and youth were able to hear from successful candidates about how to tackle this and other challenges.

Tanzanian Women and Youth Empowered to Strengthen their Leadership

“Before and after the training we gave participants an evaluation form. In the pre-evaluation form, most women were not so familiar with the basic qualities of a leader and were not so knowledgeable about democracy. After the training we found that they had greatly improved their knowledge,” said TWCP Programme Officer Ms Victoria Lahiru.

“We also noted that there was improved support between the women themselves. In Masasi in Mtwara for example, the women were declaring that they had a wish that fellow women would contest and we were seeing women leaders regardless of their party supporting each other,” said Ms Lahiru.

Back in Kyela District Ms Anna Minga Mirambo, a directly elected ward councilor in 2010 for CHADEMA is already sharing her knowledge, gained through training, with other women and inspiring them to take up the challenge of putting themselves forward as candidates in the next election.

“In 2010 I received training from TWCP Ulingo on leadership, gender, democracy and HIV. This built my confidence to a point where I was confident enough to vie for a seat. Now I am continuing to educate and build the capacity of other women from my party and other political parties using the manual that I was given by T-WCP. As a result, some six women were elected as chairpersons of their villages in the recent local elections,” said Ms Mirambo who intends to contest a parliamentary seat in 2015.

More copies of the revised T-WCP training manual used in the training will be distributed in February to enable more potential women and youth candidates to get the skills needed to run in an election.

Ms Veronika William Kanyanyila (CCM) is another district councilor who intends to use the manual to pass on leadership skills to other women candidates. Ms Kanyanyila was the UWT secretary for 10 years before being elected as a CCM special seats councilor for Lusungu District in 2005. After undergoing the T-WCP training she contested for a seat in 2010 and won.

“I was empowered and contested directly for the councilorship. I was up against one very educated man and one not so educated man. I am not so formally educated but I was elected.

“One of the important things that I learnt from the T-WCP training was confidence building so that I could build my confidence to a level where I was brave enough to take a form for contesting a ward councilor position. T-WCP also



Ms Zuhura Omary, a twice elected special seats councilor in Kyela and Chairperson of CCM Women's Wing in Kyela.

Photo credit: UN Women/Stephanie Raison

told us about the weaknesses of special seats and that women should also start preparing to go directly to the wards to contest. I was instantly awakened, I got the confidence and I took the form. I ran my campaign and I won,” she said.

UN Women will continue to partner with T-WCP on similar trainings in four other districts namely Bahi, Chemba, Masasi and Mtwara Mjini

Zanzibar Electoral Commission Moves on Policy for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion



ZEC Director of Elections Mr Salum Kassim Ali during the DEP stakeholders workshop on Gender and Social Inclusion held in Dar es Salaam in September 2014. Photo credit: UN Women/Stephanie Raison

Unguja, Zanzibar—The Zanzibar Electoral Commission (ZEC) with support from UN Women Tanzania Country Office developed a Gender and Social Inclusion Policy to promote the participation of women, youth and persons living with disabilities in electoral processes in view of this year's elections. The Policy provides an overall framework and guidance to address the barriers faced by these groups (added here). This initiative is supported by UN Women under the Democratic Empowerment Project, led by UNDP.

“We need to make sure that all aspects of gender equality and social inclusion are addressed for the 2015 general elections’ said ZEC Director of Elections, Mr Salum Kassim Ali. ‘We need to have a strategic plan and monitor and evaluate its implementation to ensure that commitments to gender equality and social inclusion are taken on board’. The policy has been developed with inputs from ZEC staff and stakeholders and was validated by the Commissioners in February.

Following the validation session ZEC Commissioner Ambassador Omar Ramadhan Mapuri said that all of the com-

missioners were happy with the Policy and the way they had worked together to draft and finalize it. He said he is positive that the Policy will be implemented.

“As a result of our engagement and with the sense of ownership we have (of the Policy) I think that everyone will be committed to implementing it,” said Ambassador and Commissioner Mapuri, ZEC.

The basic principles integrated in the Policy are respect for human dignity, individual's political rights; non-discrimination; full and effective participation in all aspects of the political and electoral processes and equality of opportunity for all members of the target groups (women, youth and persons living with disabilities).

Challenges faced by women, youth and persons living with disabilities in regard to their participation in elections include cultural practices, patriarchal ideology, negative perceptions of persons living with disabilities and mistrust of young people. Gaps in laws and procedures ruling electoral and political participation, inhibitive political parties' procedures and weak institutional systems all prevent inclusive participation. Persistent intimidation and violence against women, youth and persons living with disabilities throughout the electoral process constitute additional serious barriers that keep these groups away from the process, sometimes even from fear of losing their lives.

As part of the Policy, ZEC will focus on enhancing the role of women in the electoral commission and throughout the electoral process, promoting women both as voters and as candidates. Young people will be actively engaged in all aspects of the electoral process, as will persons living with disabilities. Internally ZEC will also modify its rules and guidelines to permit proportional representation of women, youth and PWDs within its structures and ensure a gender balance in recruitment of ZEC staff. ZEC Commissioners speaking during the validation expressed their commitment to implement the Policy.

Zanzibar Electoral Commission Moves on Policy for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion-continued



UN Women Election Inclusion Analyst (Zanzibar) Godfrey Sansa (left) and Zanzibar Electoral Commission (ZEC) Voter Education Officer and Social Inclusion Focal Person Juma Sanifu Sheha incorporating feedback from electoral commissioners into the final draft of the ZEC Gender and Social Inclusion Policy. Photo credit: UN Women/Stephanie Raison

“Our first role after the validation is to implement this policy so that in the coming election we have a good number of women participating. Our role is encourage them and to make it easy as possible for them to participate. We will also have some changes in our internal structures for employment and recruitment. I think after the validation whenever we have a chance to employ or recruit a person in our structures we will have a special priority for women and persons living with disabilities,” said Commissioner Ayoub Bakari Hamad, ZEC.

The Policy also envisions capacity building of ZEC staff on the rights and specific needs of women, youth and persons living with disabilities to ensure that appropriate information and support is provided to and reaches these

groups throughout the electoral process. The Policy considers the historical discrimination and exclusion faced by women, youth and persons living with disabilities. It will give these groups a level playing field and greater access to decision makers as a result.

ZEC expressed its appreciation for the continued support from UN Women and UNDP in the lead up to this year’s elections. In Tanzania UN Women, UNDP and UNESCO are jointly implementing the Democratic Empowerment Project (DEP) through which financial and technical support is provided to the Electoral Commissions in Mainland and Zanzibar.

Malawi passes the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill, 2015



Hon. Patricia Kaliati, Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare. Photo credit: UN Women Malawi

Lilongwe, Malawi—12 February 2015 will go down into the history of Malawi as the day on which Malawi decided to address critical issues that affect the lives of Malawians, especially women and the girl child by passing into law the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations law.

The Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations law will among other issues address the issues of child marriages in Malawi, as it raises the age of marriage to 18 years old, a complex issue, rooted deeply in gender inequality, tradition and poverty. The law is the starting point to protecting the girl child. Raising the marriage age keeps the girl child safe from the countless risk factors and human rights violations that child marriages entail.

“This is a great stride towards ensuring that the human rights of women and girls are upheld and the United Nations in Malawi joined Malawians in celebrating this this momentous achievement,” said Hon. Patricia Kaliati, Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare.

UN Women Malawi Country Director, Ms Alice Harding Shakelford, congratulated the government, parliament as well as organizations that worked tirelessly over the past few years to ensure the passing of the law.

The focus on the girl child is critical. The focus on her education, her right to family planning and not to marry at early

age, as well as the elimination of gender-based violence are key steps to ensure social-economic development for Malawi. This is why this piece of legislation is key and will further support ongoing efforts and overall contributes to economic development.

Further, the law will protect women, young, old and the girl child, against any form of abuse or violence—emotional, physical or otherwise—that are related to marriage, sexual relations and family. It will also hold those parents, who marry off their children below the age of 18 accountable to the law and ensure their prosecution.

UN Women Malawi has worked tirelessly, since the opening of its offices in 2012, to lobby for this bill.

This includes hosting continuous dialogues and consultations with parliamentarians, civil society and non-governmental organizations.

The UN in Malawi recognizes that this one of many steps required to bring the necessary changes around women and girls’ rights in Malawi and that all stakeholders have to join hands and work around implementation as well as attitudinal and behavioral change. Commitment involves collaboration between the government, parliament and civil society as well as private sector in supporting the dissemination and implementation of the new marriage law as well as others.

UN Women Malawi trains government and civil society representatives in Gender Responsive Budgeting



Participants at the Gender Responsive Budgeting training workshop held in Lilongwe in February 2015. Photo credit: UN Women Malawi

“We don’t have the skills to include gender issues in the budget.”

“The Ministry of Gender has not supported the Ministry of Finance to monitor implementation of gender responsive budgeting”.

These two statements were shared by participants of a UN Women supported Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) training held in Lilongwe from 4-6 February 2015.

Attracting participants from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Ministries of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, Education, Agriculture and the National Local Government Finance Committee, the training was facilitated by Nairobi-based Gender Responsive Budgeting Expert Dr. Jacinta Muteshi and a national consultant Mrs. Tinyade Kachika. The training workshop aimed at orienting the officers on GRB tools for gender mainstreaming in national planning and budgeting processes at all levels.

GRB is an innovative mechanism used in government planning, programming and budgeting that contributes to the advancement of gender equality and the fulfilment of women's rights. It entails disaggregating of public plans/budgets according to their impacts on women, men, and other social groups. It recognises that where the needs are different according to social groups, allocations should also be different. GRB also aims to analyse the gender-differentiated impact of revenue-raising policies and the allocation of domestic resources and Official Development Assistance. GRB initiatives seek to create enabling policy frameworks, build capacity and strengthen monitoring mechanisms to support accountability to women.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Levison Chirwa - Deputy Budget Director (M&E) in the Ministry of Finance Economic Planning and Development acknowledged that there are gender gaps in the way MOFE&PD conducts its business as such it is important that they respond accordingly at planning, programming and budgeting hence the importance of the GRB session. The need for GRB champions and leadership at all levels for the effective and successful implementation of GRB in government was greatly accentuated.

Most important are the five steps of action which the consultant emphasised as important components of GRB. The five steps shared are: a situation analysis for women, men, girls and boys; assessing how sector's policy addresses gender issues; assessing budget allocations for gender sensitive policies and programmes; monitoring of expenditures vs planned budgets; and assessing the impact of the policy, programme or scheme. The need for disaggregated data and sources was also emphasised.

As a way forward, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development committed to practising and utilising GRB in their budgeting and planning processes. A representative from the Ministry said, “this meeting has an eye opener and we promise to make a difference in the way we develop and interpret the planning and budgeting documents.”



Training workshop participants. Photo credit: UN Women Malawi

UN Women launches South African Civil Society Advisory Group



Pretoria, South Africa—Members of the newly –formed Civil Society Advisory Group . Photo credit: UN Women/Lynn Anderson

Pretoria, South Africa – In the second week of February, UN Women’s South Africa Multi-Country Office officially launched its Civil Society Advisory Group (Advisory Group), which will use its expertise to advise UN Women on its work in South Africa. The formation of the group is testament to the important role civil society plays in the campaign to achieve gender equality.

The 11-member committee — a group of nine women and two men – is comprised of members from non-governmental organizations, academia, research institutions and the private sector. Members will share their experiences and support UN Women in developing strategies to improve advocacy for gender equality and women’s empowerment in South Africa.

“This Advisory Group will be an important consultative body in regard to our programmes and work in South

Africa,” said Dr Auxilia Ponga, UN Women Representative, South Africa Multi-Country Office.

“The launch is particularly timely with awareness of the gender equality movement currently gaining momentum ahead of the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women next month,” highlighted Dr Ponga.

The 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women will take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 9 to 20 March 2015. Representatives of the Government of South Africa and accredited South African non-governmental organizations will be attending the session.

The main focus of the session will be the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 20 years after its adoption. Despite the commitments made, the Platform’s envisioned gender equality

in all dimensions of life is still an unfinished agenda. Member States, including South Africa, have submitted National Reviews ahead of the session that highlight achievements to date as well as remaining gaps and challenges and how they plan to accelerate implementation.

Following the launch, the Advisory Group and UN Women held a consultation with a broader group of representatives from gender-focused South African civil society organisations. This session was designed to ensure a range of voices are being heard and multiple organisations were given the opportunity to provide input. The National Review submitted by South Africa ahead of the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women was one of the topics discussed at the meeting, including how the issue of violence against women remains a critical area of concern.

Shaping the next generation of STEM leaders, TechWomen visit South Africa



UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka speaks at a TechWomen breakfast in Pretoria, on 27 January 2015. Photo: UNIC Pretoria.

Pretoria, South Africa—Pretoria, South Africa - The intelligent application of technology can be the game changer for achieving gender equality. That is why UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka has put a strong focus on ensuring the development of the next generation of women leaders in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

On the way to the 24th Session of the African Union Heads of States' Summit held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the Executive Director took the opportunity to spend time with delegates of TechWomen, who visited South Africa.

An initiative of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, TechWomen uses mentorship and exchange to empower participants to reach their full potential. It connects and supports the next generation of women leaders in STEM from Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East by providing them with the access and oppor-

tunity needed to advance their careers, pursue their dreams, and inspire women and girls in their communities.

The TechWomen delegation of over 50 women visited South Africa to expand their professional networks and to bolster relationships between U.S.-based mentors and emerging leaders from across Africa and the Middle East. Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka was a special guest of the delegation. UN Women's South Africa Multi-Country Office, based in Pretoria, hosted a breakfast event for the delegation on 27 January. Attended by around 200 cross-sectorial representatives, the event gave TechWomen delegates the opportunity to meet local counterparts and learn about initiatives underway in South Africa to build the STEM capacity of young women. Speakers included representatives of the South African Government, a TechWomen mentor from the U.S., as well as the UN Women Executive Director.

"Technology influences the enjoyment of almost any right, almost every aspect of society, all corners of the development agenda, and all dimensions of women's empowerment and gender equality. It is a source of solutions and opportunities," said Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka, at the event. In the audience were some of the current participants in South Africa's Techno Girl programme, in which high-achieving 15- to 18-year-old school girls from disadvantaged communities are placed in corporate mentorship and skills-development programmes. The initiative is designed to help girls make informed career choices, with an emphasis on STEM fields.

Reflecting on the event and her interaction with the TechWomen delegation, Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka reinforced the importance of harnessing the power of technology to end gender equality and congratulated TechWomen on the contribution they are making towards achieving this goal.

Executive Director urges accelerated action to end Female Genital Mutilation



Keynote address by UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka at an event at UN Headquarters on occasion of the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation

6 February, New York

Today, on International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), I want to thank the seven permanent missions that have invited us here to speak out on this subject.

This is truly a global issue.

This practice is one of the most horrific violations of a young girl's body. Of her rights. Of her future.

- In half of the countries with available data, the majority of girls were cut before age five.
- The vast majority of procedures are carried out on young girls between infancy and age 15.

FGM has absolutely no health reason nor benefit. Instead, the procedures can cause life-threatening complications, whether performed by health professionals or by traditional circumcisers.

- Girls and women that have undergone FGM are 70 per cent more likely to suffer hemorrhage after gi-

ving birth and are twice as likely to die during childbirth.

Women with FGM are less able to deliver healthy infants.

- FGM is linked to increased risks of infant death during and immediately following birth.

Each new generation of girls is born with the right to live as a full human being with control over her own body.

Each new generation offers a rich resource of talent, intelligence and enterprise to bring to society.

By irreversibly damaging them in this way, we cripple and stunt their potential, both physically and mentally. And society as a whole is the loser.

Today, nearly one-fifth of all FGM procedures are performed by healthcare providers, from doctors to midwives.

The trend towards medicalization is increasing – in some countries the rate is as high as 74 per cent.

Yet medicalizing the procedure to make it 'safer' is not a solution. It is missing the point.

This is not an act of caring. It is a culturally sanctioned act of controlled violence and violation.

FGM violates the right to health and bodily integrity.

It violates the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment.

It reinforces gender discrimination against girls and women.

It is used as a means to ensure a girl's marriageability and to control her sexuality and childbearing from a very young age, which in turn perpetuates this cycle of inequality.

A vital part of breaking the cycle and eliminating FGM is the empowerment of girls and women, together with women – and men – speaking out to deny the practice, and changed societal attitudes as to how girls are valued.

- We know that in wealthier households, the prevalence of FGM is lower.

- As mothers' educational levels rise, the prevalence of FGM among their daughters decreases substantially.

- The fewer women that are cut, the less likely their daughters will be cut.

There is an important role for medical personnel related to their position as respected members of their community, and perhaps as spouses, parents, family members, friends and neighbours – to be champions of human rights and gender equality and to lend their voices to the call to stop.

Today, research and an evidence base is building, helping us to understand more about the causes and consequences of the practice, how to eliminate it, and how to care for those who have experienced it.

Let me pay tribute to the stalwart efforts of civil society, as well as our colleagues in UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), who have done so much to bring us to where we are today, together with a growing body of governments.

I particularly applaud Member States for the adoption of the most recent United Nations resolution in 2014 committing to intensify efforts to eliminate FGM. UN Women looks forward to supporting the UN system with its implementation.

Executive Director urges accelerated action to end Female Genital Mutilation—continued

In addition to these global measures, there are new tools and programmatic interventions working directly with communities, legal reforms across countries, and an overall increase in advocacy and political will.

- Twenty-four African countries have laws against FGM.
- Twelve industrialized countries with migrant populations from FGM-practising countries also have legislation.

As a result of these efforts, the prevalence of FGM has decreased in most countries.

Overall, the chance that a girl will be cut today is about one-third lower than it was around three decades ago. Clearly, progress is being made. However, population growth means that without dramatic change, the number of girls and women and girls affected will continue to grow.

If action against FGM is not accelerated, as many as 30 million more girls alive today may be cut in the next decade alone.

That dramatic change is possible, even with population growth: countries like Ghana and Kenya have proved it. An increasing number of women and men are voicing support in their communities to end the practice of cutting. It is vital to bring out and amplify those voices. As our solidarity campaign “HeForShe” strongly asserts: men can and must also take responsibility for making the changes that affect their sisters, mothers and partners.

As this year we review the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, 20 years on, and look to the development of the new post-2015 development agenda, we can further leverage the strength of international agreements and frameworks to uphold the rights of

UN Women Eastern and Southern Africa— about us

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women’s Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) is in Nairobi, Kenya and covers 25 countries in the region. In addition, UN Women has offices in the following countries:

Burundi
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office
Ethiopia
Kenya
Malawi
Mozambique
Rwanda

South Africa Multi-Country Office (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland)
Somalia
South Sudan
Sudan
Tanzania
Uganda
Zimbabwe



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

UN Women Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office
UN Gigiri Complex, Block M, Ground floor
P.O. Box 30218-00100
Nairobi, Kenya

www.unwomen.org
www.facebook.com/unwomenafrica
www.twitter.com/unwomenafrica