

TALKING POINTS

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EGM Beijing+25

Your excellencies,

Distinguished experts and guest,

Representatives of the United Nations,

Ladies and Gentlemen, friends

This is my sixth month in the region having previously worked in Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Pacific, South and South East Asia, working on gender issues, governance and human rights. I am a veteran in BPfA review processes in Asia and the Pacific and incredibly grateful and humbled to be with you here today.

I am looking forward to discussing and seeking pivotal solutions for the advancement of women's rights and gender equality issues in this region. A region with some of the lowest scores on global gender indices in the world, yet a region with significant advancements made, as the draft report that lies before us today highlights.

My deepest gratitude goes to ESCWA, the League of Arab States and the Arab Women Organization in the partnership established in convening this meeting and the Beijing+25 review process more broadly.

Needless to say, the coming year marks a pivotal moment for gender equality, with not only the Beijing Declaration review marking 25 years, but also 20 years since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, five years since the SDGs and 40 years since the adoption of CEDAW. These are exciting and important moments that allow us to reflect, focus and identify remaining issues that hamper the achievement of women's rights.

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The coming year provides us with many different, yet linked platforms, important spaces for dialogue and opportunities for review to make decisions for further action, spread common messages, ideas and highlight concerns. To push forward common and jointly agreed to recommendations. With the ultimate goal of further implementing internationally agreed norms and standards for the advancement of women's rights, in contextually sensitive and appropriate ways.

This meeting marks a critical step in reflecting on progress. In identifying common regional recommendations for the next 5 years. In reflecting on accountability mechanisms, ways of capitalizing and accelerating political will and financial allocations to make change happen.

These days here together will allow us to go into more detail towards analyzing the findings of the regional report and in identifying key actions and pivotal solutions towards further closing the gender inequality gap in the region.

As a newcomer to the region, in reading the draft report a few issues strike me.

Clearly progress has been made on some fronts in the region, though unevenly so. We see progress on legislation adopted to advance women's economic empowerment, towards ending discrimination based on a person's sex and to end violence against women. Yet, the legislative changes are still insufficient, not holistic enough and insufficiently applied across the region.

We see progress in the development of National Actions Plans on SCR 1325, so fundamental to this region and if implemented well will certainly have a huge impact on peace and reconciliation processes.

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We see some progress on women attaining leadership positions, yet the % of women in leadership positions in this region still remains under the global average.

We see an overall increased interest throughout the region to invest in gender-sensitive data collection and analysis, so crucial to inform policy-making and financial allocations.

The report however also speaks of regression in some countries, including due to conflict. It highlights crucial socio-economic spillover effects of conflict on other countries in the region. It highlights the fragility of progress made, and the shrinking democratic space. We also know migration, climate and environmental issues affect the region. Changes in the way we communicate, including on social media are affecting how we relate, tolerate and engage. These issues dictate regional politics and progress. They are also the most difficult to tackle but also some of the most important mainstream challenges that need to be tackled from a gender perspective to be resolved.

The report further points to several key actions that need to be taken to make a difference. These actions include deepening the production, analysis and use of data to further support the advancement of women's rights. Ensuring governance systems are inclusive and transparent, well-resourced and responsive to gender inequality issues. Foundational to all issues is ending violence against women through the enactment and implementation of laws and policies. Advancing social protection and localizing international frameworks in domestic policies is of course also fundamental.

All these points are of course crucial to affect change and must remain at the top of the agenda.

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My hope for this meeting, which brings together the best minds and expertise on gender equality, is that we can push further and identify what else can be done, what innovative practices this region can bring to the table to advance progress made and halt any regression we see.

My question is what can be done differently, what has not been done before. How can we ensure to make sustainable progress and in 5 years demonstrate true transformation evidenced in improved data and statistics that currently put this region as one of the globally lowest ranked on Gender indices?

Last month in Cairo, UN Women asked the youth from the region what they thought should change in a similar workshop environment as we are today. We brought together young women and men to discuss the Beijing platform for action with veteran women leaders.

The youth was loud and clear in their expectation for a gender equal future.

Their emphasis for policy makers as described in detail in the outcome of the meeting calls for action towards understanding and addressing intersectional issues to ensure no-one is left behind. Key intersectional issues mentioned include gender and humanitarian action, migration, refugees, disabilities, rural women, asylum seekers and indigenous women and girls. The youth also expressed the need to address inter-generational violence and repercussions thereof, extremism, negative gender stereotypes and social norms that hamper progress. They also underscored the need to address the gender digital divide and women in STEM.

30% of the population in the Arab States are between 15 and 29. We must listen to them and ensure their lives and their children's lives are the ones that we picture in Vision 2030.

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As part of engaging youth and bringing on board a young generation of leaders and influencers for the achievement of GE, UN Women globally has launched a series of youth led engagements and initiatives as well as the Generation Equality Campaign. The Campaign, which I encourage you to join, includes two key Fora taking place next year May and June in Paris and Mexico, where civil society, young men and women will be able to discuss, shape and put forward key actions for the change they want to see in their lifetime. Satellite sessions will be arranged in each region based on agreements with governments.

We also have youth representatives in the room here today that were with us in Cairo last month and will also be engaged in further regional and global review processes. Welcome.

Lastly, I wish to stress the importance of engaging men and boys in making the changes we want see. Changes cannot happen in isolation and must be accompanied by camaraderie, understanding and support at all levels, starting in the household.

I am looking forward to our discussion today and tomorrow. The discussions will feed into the High-Level Meeting at the end of November where the outcome document of the Regional B+25 Review will be adopted.

UN Women of course remains committed to support you on the path into 2020 with all its big anniversaries. We stand ready to work with you and are looking forward to continuing the fruitful collaboration.

I thank you very much.