

THE TIME IS NOW

A Letter to Partners from UN Women
Executive Director Michelle Bachelet



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

March 2012

Dear Friends,

This letter comes to you with gratitude as we mark the first anniversary of operations of UN Women. It's been an exciting year and I applaud every individual, government and organization working for women's empowerment and gender equality.

From the courageous women and youth demanding freedom and democracy in the Arab world, to the rural women breaking new ground for sustainability, to the men and women mobilizing to end violence against women, to the three women who won the Nobel Peace Prize for their leadership in peace and democracy—these stories and many more inspire me to believe that equality is possible.

This is the century to end discrimination and violence against women. The time is now. Equality depends on each of us. From the government that changes its laws, to the company that advances equal pay and opportunity, to the mother and father that teach their daughter and son that all human beings should be treated equally, we are all part of the solution.

UN Women is up and running with a presence in 75 countries. Over the course of 2011, we developed a clear vision and strategic plan, put in place a new management structure, and expanded partnerships.

We've benefited from an outpouring of goodwill and support and I'm proud of what we've accomplished together. From advancing women's leadership and political participation, to increasing women's economic power, to mobilizing to end violence against women and girls, to expanding women's role in peacebuilding, to institutionalizing gender responsive budgeting, progress is being made for justice and equality.

As highlighted in our Progress of the World's Women report, *In Pursuit of Justice*, the rule of law in many countries still rules women out. There is an urgent need to make justice work for women. Peace, justice and democracy depend on the full and equal participation of women and men.

We are excited that more than 4,000 civil society representatives registered to attend the UN Commission on the Status of Women and look forward to strengthened partnerships improving opportunities for rural women and girls.



In 2012, I will place a special emphasis on advancing women's political participation and economic empowerment, enhancing UN system-wide coordination to promote gender equality, and amplifying women's voices at Rio+20, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development. I look forward to working with you in the year ahead.

Best wishes,

Michelle Bachelet

Under-Secretary-General and
Executive Director of UN Women



Women world leaders discuss Gender Equality in Politics | © UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

EXPANDING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

At this moment of historic change, we cannot afford to leave women out. During these times of economic crises, social upheaval and political transformation, the full inclusion of women expands possibilities for democracy and justice.

Expanding women's participation is a matter of human rights. Every human being has the right to take part in the government of his or her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Yet too many women have been denied the right of equal access to public service.

Last September, UN Women brought together women leaders at the United Nations to call for increased women's political participation and decision-making.

In December, the UN General Assembly called on the nations of the world to take concrete action to advance women's participation and leadership in politics, including in times of transition.

All of us have an obligation to support countries in taking forward this important resolution.

When women and men lead together, decisions better reflect and respond to the diverse needs of society.

From Sri Lanka to Costa Rica, Rwanda to Spain, where quotas have been used to boost the number of women legislators, progressive laws—to secure land rights, tackle violence against women and improve health care and employment—have been passed. Where women have organized, sometimes across party lines to ensure women's interests are represented, change has followed.

Today women make up less than 10 percent of world leaders and less than one in five members of parliament, and women who call for peace and democracy are often excluded from political negotiations and, in the worst cases, suffer human rights violations. The 30 percent critical

mass mark for women's representation in parliament has been reached or exceeded in only 30 countries.

In 2011, UN Women provided support to more than 25 countries, to candidates, political parties, voters, electoral commissions and legislative efforts to ensure that more women vote and get elected. In Egypt, Tunisia and other countries in transition, we provided support to strengthen women's political participation. In response to a call for proposals, our Trust Fund for Gender Equality is providing \$4.8 million to advance women's participation and empowerment in the Arab world.

THE TIME IS NOW.

By promoting women's equal access to political leadership, managing elections in a manner that promotes women's participation, and providing training and networking opportunities, we can increase women's leadership and participation in politics.

Having more women leaders will accelerate progress for peace and sustainable development.

ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

During this period of economic crisis, it is time to remove the barriers that prevent women from participating fully and equally in economic life. Today more than half of working women are in vulnerable jobs, gender wage gaps are still large, and balancing work and family life remains a daily struggle.

By strengthening women's economic role, economic recovery can be faster, deeper, more sustainable and fairer. Women put their income back into their communities, driving hunger, illiteracy and mortality rates down and increasing economic growth.

Eliminating barriers that discriminate against women in certain sectors or occu-

pations could actually increase labour productivity by up to 25 percent in some countries. The World Economic Forum reports that greater gender equality correlates positively with per capita gross national product. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization finds that giving women farmers the same access as men to seeds, tools and fertilizer could raise national yields by up to 4 percent, and reduce the number of hungry people by 100 million to 150 million.

In 2011, UN Women supported countries in removing barriers that limit women's economic participation—from providing training and skills to making laws, policies and conditions fair for women.

We initiated a partnership with the UN Food and Agricultural Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the World Food Programme to advance the economic empowerment of rural women, who produce nearly half of the food in developing countries. We urged private companies to embrace the Women's Empowerment Principles to advance equal opportunities and women's leadership in the private sector. So far, more than 400 CEOs have committed to the principles and we are working to exceed our goal of 500 companies by 2015.

THE TIME IS NOW.

By advancing training, equitable laws and social protection, reducing unpaid work and putting in place measures to increase equal access to opportunities and assets such as land and finance, we can register solid gains. By protecting the rights of migrant women and domestic workers, advancing minimum wage and equal pay for equal work, we can improve women's economic empowerment. By working with the private sector to embrace the Women's Empowerment Principles, we can empower women in the workplace, the marketplace and the community.

Together we can advance women's economic empowerment.



Rural women sell mango and potato jam | © UN photo/Evan Schneider

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Violence against women and girls is not just a women's issue. It diminishes each and every one of us. Change is possible and we need to take stronger action to end this pervasive human rights violation.

From Pakistan, where people from all walks of life rallied to collect one million signatures to break the silence, to countries in every region, people are coming together to denounce impunity and demand stronger action to end violence against women and girls. New laws and policies are being adopted, programmes are being established and awareness is rising.

In 2011, UN Women issued a 16-step agenda to prevent, protect and provide services to end violence against women. We moved forward with an ambitious new goal, a push to mobilize societies and governments around the world to provide women and girls with universal access to

critical support in situations of violence. We deepened our work on Safe Cities for Women and Girls with our partners from UNICEF and UN Habitat. We shared strategies and cutting-edge evidence through the Global Virtual Knowledge Center. We supported countries in advancing laws, policies, services and awareness, hosted the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE Campaign to End Violence against Women, and managed the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women.

Providing support to local groups and innovative strategies, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women shows us what works. Yet only 5 percent of proposals receive funding and too many worthy initiatives go unfunded. The UN Secretary-General's vision for the UN Trust Fund is to award 100 million dollars in grants annually by 2015. Let us join forces to make this urgent goal a reality.



*A volunteer takes notes on violence against women
© UN Women/Catianne Tijerina*

THE TIME IS NOW.

By putting in place the right laws and national plans, making justice accessible to women, ending impunity, raising awareness, engaging all sectors of society, and ensuring services for survivors, we can dramatically improve our response and reduce the incidence of violence against women and girls.

By coming together to end violence against women and girls, we come closer to peace, justice and equality.

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S ROLE IN PEACE AND SECURITY

Women are more than victims of conflict; they are leaders of peace and democracy. This message was delivered when the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to three women leaders: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee of Liberia and Tawakkol Karman of Yemen.

While women pay a heavy price during conflict, they are often the first to find solutions, promote reconciliation and ensure that every voice is heard as a country rebuilds. Yet since 1992, less than 8 percent of peace negotiators have been women; less than 6 percent of reconstruction budgets specifically provide for the needs of women and girls.

In 2011, UN Women took steps to support women's central role in peace talks, peace-building and recovery. National Action Plans to advance Security Council resolution 1325 were adopted in Burundi, Georgia, Serbia, and several other countries. Women participated in international conferences to support peace and development in Afghanistan and the newest Member State, South Sudan. Conflict-related abuses of women's rights were documented by the Commissions of Inquiry for Cote d'Ivoire and Libya, pre-deployment training was provided to UN peacekeepers to help them detect and prevent sexual violence, and 252 women



*Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon meets Yemeni Nobel Peace Prize Winner Tawakkol Karman | © UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe
MINUSTAH Guatemalan Officers participate in Medal Award Ceremony | © UN Photo/Marco Dormino*

from Africa and Asia were trained as mediators in conflict resolution.

UN Women coordinated the development of a UN system-wide Strategic framework to increase coordination, monitoring and accountability for women's participation in resolving conflict and building peace, and ending sexual violence.

UN Women and the Peacebuilding Support Office are working to advance the UN Secretary-General's 7-point action plan on women's participation in peacebuilding. Among commitments, this plan generated agreement across the UN system to triple levels of spending on gender equality and women's empowerment to at least 15% of post-conflict programming funds and to devote at least 40% of employment opportunities in post-conflict programmes to women.

THE TIME IS NOW.

By increasing women's participation in peace processes, including as mediators and negotiators; supporting women's grassroots peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts; strengthening the rule of law to protect women's and girls' rights to justice and security; securing adequate resources for women's participation, employment and security in post-conflict contexts; and monitoring progress in conflict-affected countries using Security Council resolution 1325 indicators, we improve our prospects of building peace that is sustainable.

There can be no peace when women are excluded from peace talks and suffer sexual violence during and in the aftermath of conflict.

MAKING BUDGETS AND PLANS WORK FOR WOMEN

UN Women is a leading global advocate for gender-responsive budgeting to ensure that the allocation of public resources benefits women and men equally.

In 2011, we supported countries in building capacity in gender analysis, gender budgeting, and use of sex disaggregated data for more gender responsive public policy and budgets. This approach emphasizes the importance of bringing together advocates, parliamentarians and other stakeholders into the budgeting process.

At the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, Republic of Korea, strong advocacy led to agreement to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women to achieve development results. UN Women launched a new programme on gender statistics—"Evidence and Data for Gender Equality" (EDGE). Managed by UN Women and the UN Statistical Division, EDGE links closely with the Busan Action Plan for Statistics to ensure that sex-disaggregated statistics are routinely collected in

national statistical systems to monitor and drive progress for gender equality.

In Rwanda, UN Women assisted a successful piloting of gender-responsive budgeting in four national ministries, which produced gender budget statements that were submitted to Parliament with the gen-

eral budget. Starting in 2011-2012, gender responsive budgeting is mandatory for all ministries, districts and the city of Kigali.

In Ecuador, Ministries now use gender responsive budgeting, and resources allocated for gender equality have tripled from the previous year.

UN DELIVERING AS ONE FOR WOMEN

Prioritizing gender equality throughout the UN system

The establishment of UN Women is one of the strongest expressions of UN reform to date. UN Women is charged with leading, coordinating and promoting accountability across the UN system for gender equality.

A system-wide action plan on gender mainstreaming is prepared, following consultations convened between June and November across the UN system. This action plan will provide us with a stronger foundation than ever before for promoting gender mainstreaming and accountability within the UN system.

An increasing number of UN organizations are building experience in incorpo-

rating gender markers in their financial management systems, which bodes well for increasing UN accountability. UN Women is working with UN partners to assess the feasibility of a system-wide approach to tracking resources for gender equality.

UN Women is working in partnership to support national priorities for women's empowerment and gender equality.

Today there is greater understanding than ever before that women's empowerment and gender equality are not only goals in their own right; they are also critical means to an end—economic and social progress that is just and sustainable.

ALL OF US NEED TO SAY:

- YES to more women leaders
- YES to unleashing women's economic potential
- YES to ending violence against women and girls
- YES to women's full participation in peacebuilding
- YES to budgets and plans that work for women and men
- YES to human rights for all

These are among the bold actions we must take to achieve equality between women and men. These are the priorities of UN Women.

NOW IS THE TIME. JOIN 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 supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

220 East 42nd Street
New York, New York 10017, USA
Tel: 212-906-6400
Fax: 212-906-6705

www.unwomen.org
www.facebook.com/unwomen
www.twitter.com/un_women
www.flickr.com/unwomen
www.youtube.com/unwomen



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women