

Statement of UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet

ECOSOC Dialogue of Executive Heads on QCPR

16 July 2012

Your Excellency, Mr. Desra Percaya, Permanent Representative of Indonesia,

Member States, fellow UN Heads of Agencies,

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The context of our discussions on this QCPR is profoundly different from previous ones in a number of ways. It takes place at a time of momentous change and challenges dominated by continuing financial and economic stress, the food and energy crises and their consequences for the realization of the MDGs by 2015.

At the same time, we witness an increasing number of countries reaching middle-income status. This is very good news but we have to acknowledge that this is where 70% of the world's poor people live. Addressing poverty in this century of ours will require new approaches to reducing poverty and creating an environment that allows everybody—women and men, girls and boys—to enjoy the fundamental rights expressed in the Charter of the United Nations.

Delivering on the promises of the Charter, of the MDGs and soon the Sustainable Development Goals will see a new landscape, a much more complex landscape of actors in and for development.

The worldwide voices clamoring for greater justice and for equity are loud and clear. So are the voices calling for accountability for results.

At Rio+20 three weeks ago, we agreed to set in motion a process toward the post-2015 development agenda with the development of sustainable development goals that build on the MDGs. One of the biggest challenges of our century is addressing pervasive and growing inequalities. Let us not be misled by a rising aggregate prosperity.

Given the rapidly changing context, the central and urgent question for Member States as they discuss the QCPR is what needs to change in the way the UN works so that it is best positioned to support countries to help meet these challenges and maximize its impact where it matters, at the country level, in real people's lives. This is at the heart of today's deliberations.

Member States have resoundingly reaffirmed, in the programme country survey, the UN continues to be relevant across the development spectrum from low-income to middle-income countries and in countries in transition. The UN's operational activities are judged to be closely aligned with national needs and priorities by 82 percent of countries surveyed.

Member States have pointed to the UN's impartiality, its convening power, and the grounding of our operational work in normative and human rights-based approaches as constituting its greatest assets. In today's world of rising inequality, these assets would appear to indeed be what the circumstances demand – “just what the Doctor ordered” as they say!

At a time when the concept of multilateralism itself is questioned and sees transformation, this endorsement from Member States is reassuring but also challenging—a challenge as it puts the onus back on the UN System to deliver and to demonstrate how it can build these assets to enhance its overall development effectiveness as we approach the MDG countdown and the post-2015 discussions.

To achieve this, it is fundamental that we enhance system-wide coherence and coordination.

The different instruments for ensuring system-wide coherence and coordination include the Resident Coordinator system, the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and common services and business practices. Clearly, all of these need improvement.

I note the consistent refrains in the programme country survey: “Deliver as one”; “avoid duplication”; “align with national objectives and priorities”; “be more transparent about procedures”; “synchronize resources with national fiscal plans”; “pursue upstream rather than downstream approaches” and “take country context as a starting point and provide support to key strategic priorities rather than try to provide support in all UN global initiatives. ‘Focus on

areas where the UN has a clear comparative advantage'; 'Make better use of results-based methods' and 'Improve the design of programmes and projects.'

Excellencies, your messages are loud and clear.

One area where the UN has in fact made great progress since the last QCPR is in creating successful models that show there can be enhanced coherence and functioning of the UN System.

First is Delivering as One. We now have the report of the Independent Evaluation of Delivering as One, which highlights that this way of doing business reinforces and strengthens national leadership and ownership. Today some 32 countries have voluntarily adopted this model.

While there cannot be one size fits all, the "Delivering as One" effort is a reform initiative capable of achieving greater coherence, efficiency and effectiveness in the UN's operational activities.

Here I must mention the creation of UN Women. Member States have created UN Women to bring about greater progress and system wide coherence for women's empowerment and gender equality. We are mandated to focus on both the normative and operational. It is evident that to address complex matters and emerging issues, Member States need better access to the full range of resources and mandates of the entire UN system including that of the non-resident UN organizations.

At UN Women, we have seen a greater involvement of different agencies in the Delivering as One approach and the UN Country Team as a whole addressing gender equality and women's empowerment. We have seen new and more innovative strategies and stronger leadership of national partners, including national women's machineries. In short, we have witnessed a reinvigoration of the UN system's commitment and work on gender equality and women's empowerment. And we will see even greater progress in this regard with the roll-out of the System-Wide Action Plan that was approved in April.

For the first time, the UN has a set of common measures with which to measure progress in its gender-related work, including the mainstreaming of the gender perspective across all its operations. Throughout 2012, the various UN agencies will continue to align their performance indicators on gender equality, along with their policies and work processes.

Another question is how can we become more effective in policy engagement at the country level?

The evaluation tells us that the Delivering as One pilots were particularly successful at advancing cross-cutting issues and better integration of the normative and the operational work. We need to look more closely into this and learn from this. By bringing the policy specialists together with the programme, the operational groups, UN Country Teams were able to provide more integrated policy advice and develop common policy positions for more effective public policy advocacy.

Let me now say a word on the UN Development Assistance Framework as a tool. While programme countries have indicated that the UNDAFs have helped ensure greater alignment with national plans and strategies and better dialogue between UN agencies at country level, it's clear that UNDAFs are not yet the strategic tools that they should be. UNDAF processes need to be reviewed, and in some cases streamlined and simplified, to be able to better respond to changing realities on the ground. We need to try and push the envelope further to go beyond UNDAFs: to UNDAF Action Plans (UNDAP), One Programmes, and one budgetary and funding frameworks.

We also have to examine simplified processes of review and approval of common country programming documents. Let us explore if UNDAFs and UNDAF Action Plans can be approved at the country level. Can we also have Common Country Programme Documents that replace agency programme documents, approved at the country level and perhaps endorsed by all Executive Boards? Or could the Joint Meeting of the Boards play that role?

Last, but not least, it is clear that the Resident Coordinator system is a key driver of UN system-wide coherence. Programme countries have indicated the importance they attach to this role.

But as the studies and surveys show there are challenges. Just as this century poses new and complex challenges, we need to think through different models of the RC system. We need to have a system in place that can respond to coordination needs as necessitated by the country context. Agreed decisions of the Management and Accountability Framework have to be fully implemented – by all.

That demands, in turn, adequate capacity and funding for the Resident Coordinator and United Nations Country Teams so they can do what is needed to undertake common and coordinated work.

Last, but certainly not least, we need to look at efficiency. In terms of efficiencies we have also learnt a lot. We must align and harmonize our respective agency business practices; we must move towards joint business operations and fast track implementation of all existing agreements in this regard. We must delegate more authority to our country offices; and we need to move towards simplified reporting from the country level that captures the work of the entire UN.

Every agency must feel a sense of collective responsibility for UN-wide results and have internal systems of rewards and incentives for this. As I keep telling my team at UN Women: the true measure of UN Women's success comes when the entire UN Country team is successful and that means the country sees the UN as delivering results.

These are some of the directions of change, which should be considered when we define the UN's operational priorities for the next QCPR cycle. We need to build on the good practices and approaches to coherence that many UN Country Teams have been innovating.

To be relevant and to be able to confront the complex challenges we have, and no doubt more will come, the status quo is not an option. We need to move forward if we are to help achieve our true mission: real impact for men and women, girls and boys, in their quest for better lives.