



Remarks

by

H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe

President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

International Women's Day

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Please check against delivery

Excellencies,
Former Secretary of State, Ms. Hillary Clinton,
Secretary-General,
Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women,
Ms. Andrea Nunez, Vice President of the World YWCA Board,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be with all of you today to commemorate International Women's Day (IWD) and to reflect on our commitment to equality for women and girls. To begin, I would like to thank Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka for bringing us together on this joyful occasion. Indeed, thirty-nine years after the UN first marked IWD in 1975, there is much to celebrate and there have been many global achievements

The irreplaceable role of women in sustainable development cannot be understated. We are all aware, and have known for a long time, that we will not be able to eradicate poverty without the full and equal participation of half of the world's population. Whether women manage a business, work on a farm, carry water and wood over great distances daily, or care for the younger and the older, their efforts not only support their families, they also serve their communities. It has been demonstrated time and again that investing in women reaps benefits for the entire society. For instance, increasing women's education accounts for a 43 percent reduction in child malnutrition. Giving women farmers the same access to resources as men can help increase yields on their farms by 20 to 30 per cent.

The evidence is striking and dramatic. Yet, it took a very long time for the world to embrace the basic and obvious fact that is captured in the theme for this year's commemoration: *"Equality for women is progress for all."* As we begin crafting a new development agenda for the post 2015 era, we can celebrate the world's recognition that gender equality and women's empowerment must be at the heart of sustainable development.

At the same time, let us not forget that if we are to realise our vision for a world in which women and girls can achieve their full potential, we must address the root causes of gender inequality. We must reaffirm that women and men, boys and girls have equal rights and do our utmost to ensure a woman's right to sexual and reproductive health. Let me be clear: we want to ensure that women and girls take their rightful place in the new development paradigm we are all aiming for, not only because it is critical for development, but also because equality is their right

I stated my conviction at the beginning of my presidency that incorporating the invaluable contributions of women and girls, while also addressing their needs and challenges, is one of the most critical dimensions of the post-2015 framework. Even as I speak to you, Member States, civil society representatives, UN entities and other stakeholders have gathered right next door in the ECOSOC Chamber for the High-level Event I convened on the Contributions of Women, the Young and Civil Society to the post-2015 development agenda, and their discussions are focused on equality, inclusion and participation.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The road to achieving gender equality cannot and must not be traveled by women and girls alone. Just as we know that we cannot achieve sustainable development without women, we also know that we cannot achieve gender equality without the full engagement of men and boys. In households and communities, in government and business, at the national and international levels, men are often the decision-makers. They control access to all manner of resources, from land to information, from money to influence. As religious, business or political leaders, the power they wield can tip the balance either way in the struggle for gender equality.

Therefore, if we are to translate the principle of equality into a reality for women across the world, our commitment should not only be reflected in national and international

frameworks, but also in the daily practices of communities and families. It must be woven into the social fabric of our societies so that boys can grow into men who respect the rights of women and girls.

As we celebrate this International Women's Day, I am heartened to hear more and more men and boys say loud and clear that women have equal rights and that gender violence is unacceptable. Today, I call on all men and boys to add their voices to the "He for She" campaign that is being launched here today. Please join me in telling the world why we men believe that ALL women should have equal rights, and what each of us individually can and will do to support them.

The road to gender equality may be long and winding, but it is one that men and women must walk hand in hand, in order to bring progress for all.

Thank you.
