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Statement by

**H.E. Ms. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović
President of the Republic of Croatia**

at the

**High-Level Thematic Debate of the United
Nations General Assembly**

on

**Advancing Gender Equality and Empowerment of
Women and Girls for a Transformative Post-2015
Development Agenda**

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Your Excellency Mr Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General
Your Excellency Mr. Sam K. Kutesa, President of the General Assembly

Your Excellency Ms Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia

Your Excellency Mr Ahmet Davutoğlu, Prime Minister of Turkey
Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive-Director of UN Women

Ms. Sivnanthi Thanenthiran, Executive Director, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW, Malaysia)

Miss Nohelia (Youth representative)

Rt. Hon. Michaëlle Jean, Secretary-General of La Francophonie

Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to the President of the General Assembly Mr. Sam Kutesa for inviting me to participate in this important debate on advancing gender equality and empowerment of women.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to be here with you today and to join you in the observance of International Women's Day.

It provides us with an opportunity to remind ourselves of the significant progress that has been made in advancing gender equality.

However, despite all the achievements, gender equality and empowerment of women "remains the great unfinished business of the 21st century", as Ms Hilary Clinton stated in this august body a year ago.

Therefore our meeting today also provides us the opportunity to recommit ourselves to fight for the equality of woman and girls around the world.

It is especially important to re-invigorate our commitments this year when we mark the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, fifteenth anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security.

Later this year we will also adopt the new agenda for global sustainable development beyond 2015. Three dimensions of sustainable development are well known: economic, social and environmental. But let us not forget that we need to include a robust mainstreaming of gender considerations across all parts of the framework.

We also need inclusion of a transformative stand-alone goal on achieving gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment in the post-2015 development framework and Sustainable Development Goals as grounded in the commitments enshrined in global treaties, most notably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and policy commitments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Mr President,

We all should accelerate our efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls and to realize de facto or substantive equality between women and man. We need a strong focus on achieving gender equality.

We need to address the structural causes of gender based inequalities that impede the realization of women's rights and empowerment.

Because, as is often said, empowering women is not only the right thing to do but also the smart thing to do.

For example, recently released new report by the International Monetary Fund on women in the workplace suggests that closing the gender equality gap and levelling the employment playing field would benefit not just women, but the global economy as a whole.

According to this report, the estimated gain in GDP for countries that close their gender gaps ranges from 15 to 35 per cent.

IMF managing director Christine Lagarde said about the report that "By helping women reach their full economic potential, we can also help boost growth, prosperity and stability for the whole world". So the question is what we can and should do to help women reach their full potential, not only in the economic field.

There is no doubt in my mind that women can achieve a lot when there is an environment conducive for unleashing their full potential.

During my career I have also been in the position to break the so called glass ceiling – I was the first female MFA of Croatia and the first woman Assistant Secretary General of NATO.

I believe that it is important to see more women breaking through barriers and that our aim should be that it becomes commonplace, not something special.

When questioned about how it felt to be named Israel's first woman Foreign Minister, Golda Meir reportedly said "Whether women are better than men I cannot say – but I can say they are certainly no worse".

We also have to recognize the efforts of many women who came before us, women who were real pioneers, women who had to hit that glass before us.

Let me give you one example.

Marija Jurić Zagorka, one of the most popular Croatian writers of all time, was also the first female journalist in Croatia.

When she started her career as a journalist at the end of the 19th century, it was a highly unusual career for a woman in those days, and because of that, she was humiliated and discriminated against her entire life.

She was forced to write anonymously, under pseudonyms so as to hide her gender. And in the newspaper offices, she had to hide herself at work so nobody would notice there was a woman writing for a newspaper.

This didn't stop her from being politically involved and fighting for the rights of women.

Mr President,

Gender equality means realization of substantive equality between women and men.

In order to achieve it, changes in the way we think and act are needed.

Here is one example. Although there are more women employed than ever before, very often they are worse paid than men. Studies show that in almost every country women earn less. According to the International Labour Organization, if present trends continue, it will be another 75 years before the principle of equal pay for work of equal value is achieved.

We need to abolish discriminatory laws and discriminatory practices which constitute discrimination against women, and to modify or abolish patriarchal norms, customs and harmful practise which constitute discrimination against women.

The issue of prevention of violence against women is of utmost importance.

We need to change perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that condone and justify violence against women.

Second, we need policies that are more supportive to women trying to reconcile their professional and family lives.

I have already stated that formal legal equality prescribed in gender neutral laws is not enough.

Giving everyone equal legal protection against discrimination is just the first step.

The laws have to be gender sensitive – engendered and as such they should be effectively put into practice.

It is also crucial to win hearts and minds for gender equality.

In this regard, we welcome the recent UN WOMEN's initiatives of the HeForShe campaign underlining the necessity to include boys and men in advocating women's equality and empowerment.

I believe that media and educational institution have a crucial role in this regard.

Through education and media, we can combat intolerance and prejudice, including sexism, and promote equality, diversity, understanding and acceptance.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of education.

Education is an essential investment in the future of every country. It is a crucial factor for reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development.

It is also an essential means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary for their full participation.

Mr President,

Let me also briefly refer to the issue of women in leadership positions.

Women are still not adequately represented in politics, in peace talks or in senior management positions in the private sector.

There are many reasons for it, one of which is that these are still considered "men's jobs".

Globally, women tend to be locked out of leadership positions, where gender seems to matter more than ability. Women account for only 24 per cent of senior management positions around the world.

It seems that one of the major problems they face is the impossibility of breaking the glass ceiling in professional advancement.

We have come quite far in implementing resolution 1325 by which we committed ourselves to advancing the role of women in building peace and security around the world.

Although there is a growing recognition of the role of women as peacemakers, women continue to be poorly represented in peace processes.

According to some studies, women have represented fewer than 8 per cent of participants in peace negotiations and fewer than 3 per cent of signatories.

During my career I have met many women in conflict and post-conflict countries and was deeply impressed by their courage and determination.

In 2013 I visited the School of Leadership in Kabul, Afghanistan which prepares the next generation of Afghan women for university, and eventually, positions of leadership. The girls and young women I met there impressed me with their enthusiasm, focus and self-confidence.

I wouldn't be surprised if one of the girls I met there will be one of the future Presidents of Afghanistan.

Yet, these Afghan girls and women, as many other women around the world who try to break the glass ceiling in politics, will probably be faced with various obstacles, including many gender stereotypes and prejudices.

Many women might be deterred from entering into politics or running for office by the prospect of sexist attack. Luckily, there are many who are not. In Croatia, although women are still not equally represented in political and public decision-making, there has still been visible progress in this area. Since 1995, women have held the positions of deputy prime minister and ministers, including those which were traditionally allocated to men, such as the ministries of defence, finance and construction and foreign affairs. Croatia had also a woman in the position of Prime Minister from 2009 to 2011. In 1990 there were no women in the Constitutional Court and now the President of this court is a woman. Last year the first female general was appointed in the Croatian Army and she also served as the first gender adviser to the NATO military Mission in Afghanistan.

And now we have the first female President.

Although women in politics continue to face various stereotypes, the question of their political participation has been publicly recognised as a political issue. The introduction in the Gender Equality Act in 2008 of the obligation to include at least 40% of the under-represented gender in political parties' lists has also contributed to this.

We should all continue to persistently and strongly work on elimination of such attitudes from the political and public life, because they are inappropriate and damaging to all women.

We need to break down the barriers both visible and invisible that women face in their professional lives, and to increase the representation of women in political and business leadership.

And that includes this Organization as well.

Mr President,

We must ensure that women everywhere are treated equally under the law – to have equal access and right to jobs, to inheritance, property, economic opportunity, to education, to participation in political

life. But this formal equality is not sufficient. States should adopt temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women in all those areas.

We need to accelerate advancement of women in all areas of life.

And we should never be weary of fighting to stop violence against women.

We should spare no efforts for preventing and combating sexual violence in war and conflicts.

Today in my country Croatia we are seeing that women survivors of sexual violence during the war are speaking up in order to combat impunity. They are requesting prosecution of perpetrators and fair and just reparations including financial compensation.

Mr President,

20 years after Beijing, we have certainly come far, but many examples of inequalities and discrimination around the world show that we have still not come far enough.

Some might question whether gender equality is achievable at all, because no matter how much we strive, no country has yet achieved full equality for women and girls.

Our answer should be yes, it is achievable.

The only question that we should ask ourselves is when and how.

We should ask ourselves what the UN Member states have done in advancing that goal.

And we should ask ourselves what we as politicians, as diplomats, as representatives of civil societies, as men and women, can do to finish the unfinished business.

For our part, Croatia will continue to work on realization of substantive gender equality and to support women's empowerment nationally as well as one of its main foreign policy priorities, through our bilateral relations and our activities in the United Nations and other international organizations.

Mr President,

Let me conclude by thanking you once again for convening this debate.

Let us all work for the day when gender equality becomes a way of life for all.

Thank you.