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Remarks on opening side event during UN Commission on Status of Women
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Thank you all for being here on the first day of Spring.

At the outset, let me welcome the distinguished representatives of India and the United States, the countries that were in effect founding mothers of UNDEF; it was these two large democracies who sowed seeds of UNDEF's creation by taking a joint initiative that led to Kofi Annan's establishing the Fund in 2005.

I want to take this moment to give thanks to Kofi Annan's legacy – including his efforts to empower women.

As you know, the priority theme of this year's CSW is social protection systems. To an outside observer, that sounds both abstract and incomprehensible, and possibly boring.

Today, we will hear from UNDEF activists who make the concept of social protection the opposite of boring.

Representing selected projects in Africa, Arab States, and Latin America, their initiatives are anything but abstract.

- From empowering women survivors of armed conflict in Colombia to engaging marginalized women in elections in Sudan:
- From strengthening legislation for women affected by sexual violence and exploitation in Lebanon to developing young women's leadership in Uganda:

... these projects all testify to UNDEF's focus on some of the most acute issues of our time.

And they illustrate how UNDEF is a unique model in the UN system, working to do great things with grants in relatively small amounts, creating enabling environments for civil society around the world.

UNDEF is one of the youngest entities in the UN family. It is also the only UN entity to have democracy in its name -- as you know, the word "democracy" does not appear in the UN Charter, nor is the concept embraced by all UN Member States.

Most important, UNDEF is the only entity with primary mandate to support democracy through civil society.

The NGOs we fund have described how UNDEF's support has allowed them to test themselves. How Governments in project countries see these NGOs move from mere outputs to transformative large-scale interventions.

How UNDEF's support demonstrates to women at risk that democracy means something to them. That with UNDEF support, being a refugee is not an identity and democracy is a concept where women have voice and agency.

We will also hear more about that from our expert moderator, Professor Wairimu Njoya.

But first, I give the floor to Ambassador Naidu of India, the world's largest democracy.