

Remarks by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, at High Level Side Event on Strengthening cooperation on migration and refugee movements in the perspective of the new development agenda - 30 September 2015

I'd like to thank the Secretary – General, and the Deputy Secretary-General, for organizing this important event at such a crucial point in time.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is important that together we ensure not only the right emotional response, but that we find strategic and practical approaches that correspond to the challenge.

In the collective action that must be taken, we cannot forget that refugee and migration concerns needs to be linked to human rights, peace and security, and development.

We cannot forget that women refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are disproportionately vulnerable to exploitation, violence and abuse. If the response to the largest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War is insufficient or does not consider the multiple discriminations that women face, their vulnerability will be significantly heightened and their needs will not be served.

Women and girls have become direct objects of aggression and subjugation by extremist factions, and of routine violence in countries in conflict. At home they risk a denial of their educational, economic and social rights. Many have been subjected to abuse, sexual exploitation and even enslavement. They flee to avoid these. This drives them to use smuggling networks or others who may exploit, traffic, injure or abandon them before they reach their destination.

Women and girls have become explicit targets of aggression and subjugation by extremist groups, and of routine violence in countries in conflict. At home they risk being denied their educational, economic and social rights. Many have been subjected to heinous abuse, sexual exploitation and even enslavement. They flee danger to avoid this, only to run straight into smugglers or others who may exploit, traffic, injure or abandon them before they reach their destination.

A change in women's migration patterns increasingly being documented is the rise of women using dangerous routes that were previously the preserve of men. Another disturbing trend that appears to be increasing is that of sexual exploitation of women on their journeys to seek safety and sanctuary.

While we lack sex-aggregated data on the death rate of migrants at sea, it is known that women and girls are less likely to know how to swim and are therefore at higher risk of drowning in cases of emergencies and shipwrecks. In addition, women tend to bear the main responsibility for looking after children which makes it difficult for women to survive during emergencies at sea.

There is an urgent need for humanitarian action to address the specific needs of women and girls and to empower them as equal partners. This includes ensuring safe routes for refugees and migrants, in particular for women and children at risk of violence, and providing safe spaces and special protection for them when they arrive. We must make sure that we are able to provide them with opportunities for education and work, as well as protection against further violence. Their dignity is paramount

Our collective action must be gender-sensitive and take into consideration the different needs and challenges of women, girls, men and boys.

Secretary-General, thank you again for convening this significant event.