

11 February 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At the International Day for Women and Girls in Science**

Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to speak at this – the very first – International Day for Women and Girls in Science.

Last year's decision on this issue by member states was in itself an important step towards recognizing the role of women and girls in science.

To some, it may seem superfluous to have an international day on this issue.

After all, if there is one field where one would assume that people are judged on the merits of their results, it is science.

But unfortunately, history proves that this is not the case.

Marie Curie, for instance, was the first woman to receive the Nobel Prize and went on to win it twice – in both Physics and Chemistry.

She was also the first female professor at the Sorbonne University in Paris.

But for both, she faced incredible resistance from the scientific community, because she was a woman.

Indeed, her first nomination was only acceptable because it was shared with two male scientists; and only possible because of the pressure exerted by Swedish female scientists and women's advocates.

And it was only after 10 years of further hard work, that she finally got the recognition that she deserved in her own right.

This was the early 1900s.

Now, more than 100 years later, our world has changed dramatically, often for the better. But still today women continue to face major obstacles in the home, in the work place and across all of society, including in the world of science.

Those obstacles have been recognized and addressed in the incredibly ambitious and revolutionary 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which 193 world leaders signed off on last September.

The center piece of that agenda – the Sustainable Development Goals – places gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at its core.

It recognizes the importance of girls and women not just as beneficiaries but as contributors and drivers of change.

Making these goals a reality, however, is a daunting task.

As President of the General Assembly, I am determined that in 2016, we keep the momentum going and secure some early successes.

To do so, we need actions at all levels from an unprecedented number of actors.

Especially women and girls – half the world's population.

For the past 15 years, women have led the way in translating the last international goals into a reality.

Female teachers have helped improve gender parity in primary schools.

Female doctors have helped tackle HIV and Aids and female community health workers have helped improve maternal health and educate other women and adolescent girls about sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Now we need more women involved in more sectors.

Science, technology and innovation is one of the foundations upon which we will build action around the SDGs.

And women who are scientists today, and girls who aspire to be scientists tomorrow, must be empowered to play a central role.

The responsibility to make this happen falls to all of us – to men, women and children; to political leaders and civil society; to educators, academia and the private sector.

Through this Commemorative Day, we can help generate awareness, investment, and capacity building so that we can all fulfil that responsibility.

To conclude, allow me to return to the great Marie Curie:

- A migrant
- A scientist
- A woman
- A change-maker

For not only did she show the world what women can do, she showed the world of science what they can do – for humanity and for the vulnerable.

Because it was her scientific work and innovation that helped the injured and the dying on the battlefield, during the second world war and onwards.

Now in 2016, we need similar commitment, similar innovation and similar inspiration to realize the SDGs and transform our world for people and planet.

I wish you all a fruitful International Day of Women and Girls in Science and a constructive debate.

Thank you.