



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

16 September 2019.

Excellency,

I wish to convey my heartfelt thanks for your participation in the Informal High-level meeting on “Women in Power – Call for Action & Women Leaders – Voices for Change and Inclusion: Joining Forces and Redoubling Efforts to Achieve Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment for All” which was held on 12 September 2019 at the United Nations Headquarters, in New York. Attached please find the summary of the event.

I am pleased to acknowledge the role played by many member states in ensuring a very dynamic and lively discussion throughout the event. Your demonstration of commitment and support for initiatives to achieve gender equality and promote the empowerment of all women and girls around the world leaves is a source of satisfaction for me as I wound up my tenure as the President of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I would also like to take this opportunity to solicit your support to convey to your various capitals the importance of having more leaders committing to the “Call for Action”, issued on the occasion of the high-level event on “Women in Power”, held on 12 March 2019, which has received so far, the support of 26 leaders. I truly believe that the eight areas identified therein are key to promoting women’s leadership through concrete efforts in policymaking and advocacy.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the critical mass of support we built towards the adoption of the Resolution on Beijing+25 and urge you to continue to build momentum on women’s rights ahead of the celebration of the landmark event in September 2020, even as we maintain the gains we have made over the years.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "M. ESPINOSA".

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés

All Permanent Representatives and  
Permanent Observer Missions to the United Nations  
New York

**Informal Plenary Meeting on Women in Power – Call to Action & Women Leaders –  
Voices for Change and Inclusion: Redoubling Efforts to Achieve Gender Equality and  
Women’s Empowerment for All.**

**12 September 2019, ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations Headquarters**

**Informal Summary**

**I. Introduction**

1. H.E. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, on 12 September 2019, convened an Informal Plenary Meeting on Women in Power – Call to Action & Women Leaders – Voices for Change and Inclusion: Redoubling Efforts to Achieve Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment for All. The Informal Plenary Meeting was convened as a follow-up to the President’s high-level event on 'Women in Power' held on 12 March 2019 where a Call to Action, which currently has 26 signatories of notable women global leaders, was issued as well as to join forces with the initiative, Voices for Change and Inclusion, promoted by 47 Women leaders.
2. The informal high-level meeting witnessed the attendance of many in and outside the United Nations, including H.E. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, President-Elect of the 74<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNGA, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo Ngucka, Executive Director of the Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UNWomen) and H.E. Susana Malcorra, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Argentina and former Chief de Cabinet of the former UN Secretary General, H.E. Ban Ki Moon.
3. The event aimed at identifying best practices required for the implementation of key actions that are needed to promote synergies with networks that encourage women’s participation; support the sharing of knowledge and experience; consider measures to create an environment where gender equality is respected, and inclusion is part of the organizational culture in all spheres of society, including the role of men and promote the mentoring of young women to strengthen their capacity to participate in politics.
4. The Informal Plenary Meeting consisted of an opening Segment, and two interactive panel discussions on:– “Synergies Between the Global Networks that Encourage Women Participation and Support the Sharing of Knowledge and Experience”; and “Synergies Between the UN Networks that Encourage Women Participation and Support the Sharing of Knowledge and Experience”. The Informal Plenary Meeting witnessed the active participation of member states particularly by affording them the opportunity to share good practices and engage in substantive discussions on gender equality, women’s empowerment, sustainable projects and promotion of viable synergies across sectors.

## **II. Summary of Discussions.**

### **Opening Segment**

5. In her opening remarks, H.E. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, underscored that the event marked the last of her signature events on gender equality at the UN and called for reaffirmation of commitment to gender equality by building on the work of the session and momentum, ahead of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2020. She paid glowing tribute to those women leaders who had cooperated with her to ensure there is a counter-narrative to the anti-feminist, anti-multilateralist headwinds being faced globally. She briefly captured the substance of her Call to Action and that of the Women Leaders Voices for Change and stressed the essence of working together to make tangible difference both on the ground and at the international level. PGA noted that a wealth of evidence abound that support the fact that women's political, economic and social participation leads to positive outcomes – in social investment, in peace building, in GDP growth, and in the health and education of their communities.

6. She then advised that the forthcoming UNGA high level week should focus on the most transformative, scale-able actions that can be taken up in the coming years such as advancing gender equality. She emphasized that the world would no longer accept that it would take 108 years – more than a century – to close the global gender gap, and 202 years to achieve economic parity. She also described as unacceptable the fact that only 22 of 193 UN Member States have female heads of state or government and that 35% of women experience physical or sexual violence, or that over 70% of trafficking victims are female. She reiterated the concern that women still lag behind on virtually every development indicator, especially if they are older, have a disability, or are from a rural, ethnic minority or indigenous community.

### **H.E. Tijjani Mohammad-Bande, PGA-Elect 74<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNGA:**

7. The President Elect of the 74<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly stressed that the occasion offered an opportunity to listen and learn from voices of change that was sweeping throughout the UN on the narratives of gender equality. According to him the narratives were crucial to fostering gender equality and ensuring women's empowerment. He praised the PGA for having successfully worked to build a platform for women's leader during the 73<sup>rd</sup> Session and assured that he would use the Seventy-Fourth Session to continue and build on the platforms created to accelerate gender equality.

8. He mentioned important milestones that would mark his tenure such as the celebration of ten years since the establishment of the UN Women, two decades since the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and stressed that such milestones would serve as catalyst; galvanizing multilateral action into tangible results for women and girls. He emphasized that Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development would not be realized without ensuring that women and girls have equal opportunity to participate, and lead, at every level of decision-making, on every issue. To this end, he announced his readiness to become an International Gender Champion and expressed commitment to ensuring gender equality throughout the work of the Office of the President during the Seventy-Fourth Session of the General Assembly. While quoting from the work of a Nigeria young female poet, Chimamanda Adichie, PGA-Elect remarked in conclusion that”

*“Gender is not an easy conversation to have... Because thinking of changing the status quo is always uncomfortable.”*

**H.E. Susana Malcorra, Women Leaders Voices Force for Change and Inclusion:**

9. H.E Susana Malcorra remarked that 47 women leaders across the world had come together to establish the Women Leaders Voices for Change and Inclusion to push back the current gender gap in all ramifications. She observed that there was room for improvement to better reflect the needs of the world in the 21st century. She stated that in many places promoting the rights of women was interpreted as direct challenges to existing power structures. She called for reinvestment in policies including legal and social frameworks to achieve gender equality. She declared that the time was right for men and women to join forces to achieve gender equality.

**Panel I - Synergies Between the Global Networks that Encourage Women Participation and Support the Sharing of Knowledge and Experience.**

10. This panel was chaired and moderated by Ms. Josette Sheeran, President and CEO of Asia Society and comprises:

- Ms. Isabel Saint Malo, Former Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Panama and member, Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC);
- Ms. Verlaine Diane Soobroydoo, Policy Adviser on Women, Peace and Security Focal Person- African Women Leaders Networks – Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the UN;
- H.E. Thilmeeza Hussain, Permanent Representative of the Maldives to the UN;
- Ms. Susan Papp, Managing Director of the Policy and Advocacy of Women Deliver.

## **Key Messages**

11. Panelists stressed the imperative of partnerships and collaboration among various global networks already promoting and advancing narratives on women equality and empowerment of women. They noted that collaborative efforts were needed to push back on the “push back” against women empowerment and identified the following areas as crucial:

- Women had long been left behind of the social and economic strata.
- The adoption of the Beijing adoption led to unprecedented global advocacy for human rights and gender equity and 2020 would present another golden opportunity to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> year of its historical declaration and improve on its achievements.
- Advocacy, including social and political changes are necessary to catalyze the change and bridge the gender gap.
- Women’s groups need to be organized, engaged and legitimized as there were many obstacles facing women which ranged from lack of funding for women’s organizations, and network building opportunities. Therefore, opportunities for training, mentorships and network building would need to be enhanced. Also, discriminatory laws, policies and practices would need to be eliminated while implementation of laws against gender-based violence would need to be scaled up.
- More women voices are required at various levels of leadership particularly as organizational structures and institutions, including militaries and parliaments, need to redouble efforts to have more gender equality in their leadership positions.
- Efforts taken globally to reduce the gender gap would need to be enhanced. The current process for promoting gender equality was recognized as being too slow.
- Gender equality was considered as both an economic and human rights issue. The potential benefit of having gender equality in the world economy was considered very significant.
- The private sector could play a major role in promoting gender equality by keeping women in high-level management and exercising mandatory quota for women in leadership posts.

## **Interactive Discussion.**

12. At the ensuing interactive discussion, many delegates stressed the need for synergies that would strengthen existing structures for gender equality. They stated that gender equality was an investment that benefit all and sundry. Different country level experiences were given to support the call for gender equality and empowerment of women.

## **Panel II - Synergies Between the UN Networks that Encourage Women Participation and Support the Sharing of Knowledge and Experience.**

13. This panel was moderated by H.E. Ambassador Darja Bavdaž Kuret, Permanent Representative of Slovenia to the UN and comprised:

- H.E. H.E Katalin Annamária Bogyay, Permanent Representative of Hungary to the UN, Founder of the Circle of Women Ambassadors
- H.E. Alya Bint Ahmed Al Thani, Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN and Co-Chair Group of Friends on Gender Parity
- H. E. Jacqueline O'Neill Ambassador for Women Peace and Security of Canada
- Ms. Annelies Verstichel, Permanent Mission of Belgium to the UN. Women in International Leadership Development (WILD)
- Mr. Michael Kaufman, White Ribbon Campaign. Author, "The Time Has Come. Why Men Must Join the Gender Equality Revolution."

### **Key Messages**

14. In kicking off discussion on the theme which is about synergies between UN networks that encourage women participation, the moderator stressed the need for the continuation of the initiatives created by the current PGA. She emphasized the importance of strong leadership and synergies to entrench the culture of gender equality at the UN by charging the panelists to explore areas where the fundamentals of sustainability could be best promoted.

15. The panelists in their various submissions agreed on the imperative of continuity and sustainability. They noted that for the culture of continuity to be sustained, cooperation, collaboration and partnerships were needed to facilitate meaningful conversations among various actors within and outside the UN. At the end, there was convergence on the following assumptions as being critical to facilitating synergies that will encourage women participation and sharing of knowledge:

- Promotion of the moral imperative of the subject across various UN organs through the critical mass of opportunities already created with the current total number of 49 women Permanent Representatives at the UN;
- Encouragement of all women PRs towards the promotion of the objective including the involvement of all talented women diplomats at Missions and the UN.
- Mobilization across various levels of responsibilities involving women at the UN was regarded as important to promoting synergies.
- Combating institutionalized stereotype and joining forces through collaboration with men was also identified as critical to promoting synergies across initiatives.
- Leveraging the networks of existing initiatives such as the Group of Friends of Gender Equality facilitated by the PR of Qatar to the UN, H.E. Alya Bint Ahmed Al Thani, which has already formed a monitoring unit to track the progress of the SG on gender parity and resolved to nurture young women at the UN.
- Building on the momentum already established by the adoption by consensus of the modalities resolution on Beijing+25.

- Leveraging other networks such as Women in Leadership and Development (WILD) which has created a good mix of women involvement in terms of spread, geographical location, hierarchy and portfolios;
- Involvement of men in promoting synergies by mobilizing men's voices in generating healthy conversations and understanding the diversity of such conversation such as the track being pursued by the White Ribbon Movement created by the Canadian Author, Michael Kaufman.
- Deployment of existing platforms at the UN to enhance awareness on gender equality especially as the issue is not just about parity but a revolution that defines who we are and how we transform our society and values.

### **Interactive discussion**

16. At the ensuing interactive session following the discussion, various submissions were made which hinged on the fact that for viable synergy to be promoted, the following elements should be sustained:

- Need for synergy across various structures, organs and levels.
- Strong affirmation of the rights of choice for women.
- Enhancing and sustaining political will for gender equality.
- Good examples and practices evolving from various Missions at the UN need to be promoted, encouraged and sustained – for example, emanating from the UK and Canada Missions where Diplomats are being encouraged to make a gender pledge.
- Collaboration with CSOs, NGOs and other interested individuals.

### **III. Closing Session:**

17. In her remarks while declaring the informal high level closed, H.E. Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces, President of the seventy-third session of the United Nations General Assembly expressed optimism that UN will continue to make progress in promoting a culture of gender parity and facilitating gender equality globally. She expressed satisfaction with the achievements recorded during the 73rd Session and commended the efforts of all UN organs, agencies and individuals that had made the achievements possible. To ensure sustainability, she reiterated the importance of strong partnerships and collaboration among various actors within and outside the UN.