

UNGA Platform of Women Leaders

“Transformative Solutions by Women Leaders to Today’s Interlinked Challenges”

20 September 2022

INFORMAL SUMMARY

The President of the General Assembly and the Executive Director of UN Women convened the first United Nations General Assembly Platform of Women Leaders on the theme of “*Transformative Solutions by Women Leaders to Today’s Interlinked Challenges*” on Tuesday, 20 September 2022, at the margins of the UNGA High-Level Week. The meeting theme focused on three critical global challenges: the climate crisis, COVID-19, and conflict.

Her Excellencies President Katalin Novák of Hungary, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh, Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir of Iceland (speaking as well as Chair of Women World Leaders), Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata‘afa of Samoa, and Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja of Uganda, as well as Prime Minister Evelyn Wever-Croes of Aruba and Prime Minister Silveria E. Jacobs of St. Maarten representing the Kingdom of the Netherlands, participated in the meeting. Former Prime Minister Helen Clark of New Zealand moderated the discussion.

A summary of the discussions is below.

Opening:

His Excellency **Mr. Csaba Kőrösi**, President of the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly, opened the meeting by thanking His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly, for initiating this platform as a standing event for women leaders during the High-level Week of the UN General Assembly. **Ms. Helen Clark** introduced the agenda, noting her pleasure in accepting the invitation to chair this formal meeting of women heads of state and government, which are growing in numbers. His Excellency **Mr. Abdulla Shahid**, President of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly, provided opening remarks, expressing his hope that a growing number of women leaders will join on future occasions and asserting his conviction that a gender-equal world requires that women have an equal voice. Prior to delivering opening remarks, Her Excellency **Ms. Sima Bahous**, Executive Director of UN Women, read a statement by Her Excellency **Ms. Amina Mohammed**, UN Deputy Secretary-General, which noted gender equality’s centrality to effectively addressing the climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and conflicts, both new and continuing. The Executive Director then provided opening remarks, emphasizing that placing gender equality at the forefront of the multilateral arena is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. She recalled that equality is far off in terms of women’s political representation and called for greater political will to increase the number of women in leadership positions.

Moderator **Ms. Helen Clark**, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, invited leaders to share their experiences of executing decisive and inclusive leadership and policies with three guiding questions:

- 1. What are the actions that you have taken to lead effectively in crisis management, communication, and rapid response as it relates to today's interlinking crises in the areas of health, conflict, and climate change?*
- 2. What are your recommendations or shared lessons for leading in crisis response and recovery?*
- 3. What information do you need to fully understand how women and girls are impacted differently by health, conflict, or climate-related crises to design and adopt socially inclusive policies?*

Discussion:

The leaders stated that despite progress in promoting gender equality, including in decision-making, levels of women's political participation remain low. They emphasized the importance of diverse leadership. They also stressed the need for women and men to work together to achieve progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, inclusive of SDG 5, and bring awareness to the unseen inequalities and discrimination faced by women and girls. Women leaders agreed that the need to create more opportunities for women to participate in political decision-making is essential to achieve the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The discussion focused on the following issues:

Women's leadership in the context of COVID-19.

Women leaders presented the experience of leading their countries in combatting the pandemic and addressing its impacts on their populations. Some asserted that, in countries with women in high-level leadership positions (including as Prime Minister and Minister of Health), a gender lens was more likely to be applied to the COVID-19 response. Crisis teams led by women considered the needs of the most vulnerable to a greater extent, especially older persons, women in the informal labor sector, and children. In some countries, this resulted in keeping pre-schools open to ensure continuity for children and their working parents and increased services and funding to address increasing rates of domestic violence. In some countries, national campaigns were launched to raise awareness about sexual assault.

Climate change and environmental degradation, and humanitarian crises

The discussion also highlighted the specific impacts of climate change and natural disasters on women and girls, including flooding. It was underlined that since crises disproportionately affect women and girls, it is essential to include women in solving them.

Women leaders also touched upon the challenging impacts of the conflict in Ukraine on women and girls and, more broadly, the gendered impact of humanitarian and refugee crises.

Economic empowerment of women

The women leaders stressed the need to promote women's participation in all sectors, including sports, justice, law enforcement, and political decision-making. In some countries, having more

women represented in politics has strengthened support for women's economic empowerment and access to finance. The importance of enabling women to manage motherhood and professional careers was highlighted, alongside concrete policy examples such as parental leave and tax policies that can be introduced to provide incentives for working mothers and fathers to share unpaid care work burdens, for example, through an expanded daycare system enabling women to return to paid work in the formal labor market.

Some leaders drew attention to the correlation between the economic situation of a country and its impact on the degree of empowerment of women and girls. A leader highlighted that limited budgetary resources tend to be assigned to cover the most pressing needs of low-income countries, often overlooking a gender dimension. It was noted that, especially for developing states, ensuring adequate resources for gender equality policies with domestic public finance is challenging.

Education

The leaders highlighted the importance of women's leadership at the highest level to prepare future generations for participating in public life. The importance of role models for young girls and women was also mentioned. Ensuring access to quality education for girls, particularly secondary education, was considered vital for achieving gender equality. Women leaders also touched upon girls' education in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) as key to preparing girls for future jobs and leadership roles.

Closing and key takeaways:

His Excellency Mr. **Csaba Kőrösi**, President of the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly, closed the meeting, expressing his appreciation for the inspiring and captivating discussion and summarizing key takeaways. First, that gender inequality among world leaders against a backdrop of crises shows how societies lose out when women are not in leadership roles and what needs to change. Additionally, gender equality and diversity in leadership and decision-making improve well-being and crisis management. Finally, women's leadership is transformative.

The world needs women's wisdom, energy, leadership, and empathy to address today's interlinked crises. Participating leaders expressed their hope that this initiative would be continued and that next year, even more women Heads of State and Government would participate in the UNGA Platform of Women Leaders.