High-Level Thematic Debate: Advancing Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls for a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda

Thank you to the President of the General Assembly for convening this very important debate on advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls for a transformative post-2015 development agenda.

And thank you Madame Chair - President Sirleaf - for chairing this meeting, which reflects Liberia’s commitment to advancing the status of women and girls.

The UAE welcomes and fully supports the “He for She” initiative. Our Foreign Minister, H.H. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, was the first foreign minister in the Arab world to sign onto this initiative.

The United Nations finds itself at an important point in its history. This year marks the twenty-year anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the fifteen-year anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. It is also the year where several high-level review processes on Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding, and Women, Peace and Security are taking place. In addition, the post-2015 development agenda will be concluded and adopted this year.

This presents us with an opportunity to reflect on the gaps and challenges we’ve faced thus far, in addition to providing us with an opportunity to ensure that gender equality and women’s empowerment are fully integrated into these processes. Only when we address gender equality and women’s empowerment in a holistic and comprehensive manner - throughout all processes - will we ensure that we are closer to achieving our goal - that of gender equality.

Madame Chair,

In order for the international community to be effective in creating an agenda that is truly transformative - one that positions gender equality and women’s empowerment at its center - we must ensure that we are holistic in our approach.
For instance, when looking at how to ensure and increase women’s political participation, such a goal has to be pursued through multiple channels; It is not solely a key piece of the development agenda, but is also a result of effective development policies.

This includes ensuring that capacity-building mechanisms are pursued on a national level. In order for women become leaders and meaningful participants in the political sphere, governments must recognize and advocate for their participation, in addition to providing concrete opportunities for women to attain these roles. Political participation also requires recognizing women as agents of change. This could be as mediators or negotiators in peace processes, as justices in the court, as ministers in the government. We must shift the perception that views women solely as victims.

On the international level, the UN must ensure that gender considerations become a central component to all reviews and processes, particularly in the peacekeeping review process, as well as the peacebuilding review process. It is imperative that recommendations included in the Global Study for the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 give equal weight to participation, along with the three additional pillars.

In the UAE, women’s political participation is one of our top priorities. Since its founding, our leadership has strongly advocated for the full and meaningful participation of women in all sectors. A key component of the UAE’s development strategy from the beginning has been the engagement of women in the workforce and as decision-makers at the highest levels, recognizing women as equal partners in the development of the nation. These efforts have been spearheaded by H.H Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak, Chairwoman of the General Women’s Union and the Family Development Foundation and President of the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood which launched the National Strategy for UAE Women’s Development in 2002, to support women’s contributions in all aspects of life.

The National Strategy on the Advancement of Women, which seeks to enhance the role of women and their meaningful participation in politics, education, the health sector, the economy, the social sphere, and media, while overcoming challenges that prevent women’s participation.
In the UAE, women comprise 17.5% of our parliament, and we have 4 women cabinet ministers. 20% of our diplomatic corps is composed of women. Two-thirds of workers in the governmental sector are women. We still have a ways to go, but we have made great strides in our country’s young history.

We must also work to ensure that economic opportunities are made available to women. In order to accomplish this, we must recognize that economic empowerment is closely linked to education. We must also design and implement a development agenda that upholds the actions and principles outlined in the Right to Development. This includes sustaining and fulfilling Official Development Assistance commitments, which lays the foundation for an effective development platform.

In the UAE, we take great pride in continually meeting and voluntarily exceeding our financial commitments for development. In 2013, we spent 1.25% of our gross national income as aid, when the global goal was set at 0.7% for developed countries.

On a national level, the UAE has been consistent in developing policies to support women’s economic empowerment. There are currently 20,000 women entrepreneurs in the UAE, comprising 10% of all Emirati entrepreneurs. This constitutes a 58% growth since 2012.

In December of 2012, the UAE passed a law calling for women’s mandatory representation in all boards of governmental corporations and bodies. This makes the UAE the first country in the region to implement such a law, and the second in the world.

For the international community to develop an effective post-2015 development agenda that truly advances gender equality and women’s empowerment, we must recognize the linkages that exist between empowerment and other spheres, such as education. We cannot have one, without the other. We know that when women are educated and empowered, societies as a whole benefit. We have lower maternal and child mortality rates, boys and girls stay in school longer, and more money is reinvested back into households. This all leads to poverty reduction and stronger economies. We must also recognize that the empowerment of women is achieved through ensuring access to and control over resources.
For this agenda to be truly transformative and fulfil its promises of gender equality and women’s empowerment, we must bring all actors on board. This includes not only government actors, but also recognizes the important role that the private sector can play in implementing and taking responsibility for development. The private sector often brings new ideas and innovation that can lead to positive development outcomes. Governments and private sectors actors can work together to further the implementation of the post-2015 agenda.

We must create space for women to be leaders and decision-makers in the design and implementation of sustainable development strategies; we must ensure that local knowledge and individual cultures are embraced and fully incorporated into this agenda in order to create effective solutions that benefit all.