



5th Ministerial Conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Women's Role in Development of OIC Member States, Baku, Azerbaijan, 20-21 October 2014

Statement by Ms. Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN women

Excellences, Honorable Ministers and representative of member states of the organization of the Islamic cooperation, As-salamo alaikom.

It is a great honour to address the fifth ministerial meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation on the role of women in development.

I would like to thank our hosts, the Government of Azerbaijan, for the warm hospitality extended to participants. In this beautiful country, **women and men enjoy equal rights under Azeri laws, and the government has made a strong commitment** with the establishment of its state committee on women's issues to protect women's rights and advance empowerment.

I also thank you for this opportunity and express UN Women's appreciation of the **leadership role of the OIC** and its **57 member states that are home to more than 750 million women and girls.**

As members of the OIC, **your nations span over four continents bringing tremendous cultural diversity and dynamism, to drive, influence and lead the transformation we collectively aspire to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.** These 750 million women and girls are the focus here as we discuss their potential, empowerment and their critical contribution to sustainable development.

We meet here at a historic juncture as we embark on the global review of the Beijing platform for action, and as the nations of the world are coming together to accelerate the achievements of the MDGs and define a new global development framework with a specific goal to attain gender equality and empower women everywhere.

The 12 critical areas of concern and platform of action presented in the Beijing declaration 20 years ago are at the heart of the 2012 Jakarta declaration and the OIC's Ten-year Programme of Action, which reflect the strong commitment made by all member states of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation.

The Jakarta declaration did not only recognize women's economic empowerment as a key strategy for poverty reduction. It also affirmed women's access to education, and urged the OIC Member States to intensify effort to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls.

This commitment provide a strong foundation for translating and strengthening laws aimed at supporting women's access to opportunities, protection from violence, and participation in decision-making processes, as well as ensuring their rights in line with CEDAW.

As mandated by the ECOSOC last year, UN Women is carrying out a comprehensive assessment of progress made and challenges remaining in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at national, regional and global levels. So far we have received reports from 48 of the 57 OIC countries.

The reports are currently being comprehensively analyzed and will feed into the global Report of the Secretary-General, draw out lessons for accelerating implementation and realizing women's and girl's human rights in the post-2015 context .

Over the last two decades, we have seen progress, though uneven, across and within countries, in areas such as girls' education and women's labour market participation. However, Women's increased educational attainment and rising participation in the labour market have not been matched with better employment conditions, prospects for advancement and equal pay.

Women are concentrated in low paid vulnerable jobs with limited access to social protection and other entitlements.

More than **125 countries** have outlawed domestic violence against women, and the constitutions of more than **139 countries** guarantee women's rights. At the same time a **large gap** remains between laws and their implementation.

Violence against women and girls persists in many forms and violations of women's rights continue. And women remain **underrepresented in decision-making** at all levels.

While our analysis of the national reports is ongoing, we are seeing that **Member States are seeking to address these gaps and challenges through a broad range of policies and programmes.** Despite these efforts, it is clear that **urgent and sustained actions are needed to accelerate implementation by transforming the structures and institutions – economic, political and social – that are holding back progress** on gender equality and this requires:

- governments to demonstrate strong leadership and commitment to advance women's rights and counter extremist agendas that are inimical to women's rights;
- reaching the most marginalized women and girls by tackling stark and rising inequalities and multiple forms of discrimination;
- strengthening and supporting women's and civil society organization to exert greater influence in policy decisions; and
- **Exponentially increase investment in gender equality and women's empowerment. It is clear that there is a significant resources gap when it comes to investing in this issue.**
- Many countries of **the OIC are in a strong position to invest in supporting other developing countries of the OIC in advancing women's empowerment and gender equality and we look forward to strengthened partnership to address these gaps and challenges.**

Through our presence in 90 countries, including the majority of the OIC countries, UN Women's teams work closely with governments, civil society organizations **to extend policy and programmatic support to national partners to advance women's rights, leadership, political and economic participation and gender responsive budget and planning.** Our presence on the ground provides us with insights to the **talent and immense potential women in the Muslim world**

have and can contribute with for the overall advancement of their societies. **From our experience, this potential is not yet fully tapped and capitalized on.**

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As we convene here at this moment, **women in some areas of the Muslim world** are facing new challenges to their rights and livelihoods, and some are **facing severe threats to their security and the well-being of their families.**

Women and girls in Iraq, Syria and Nigeria have been targeted, Kidnapped, trafficked and subjected to grave human rights violation by terrorist-extremist groups.

Groups like ISIL, Boko Haram and the Taliban have been committing atrocities against women in the name of religion.

We all have **no doubt that these practices are far from the tolerant principles of Islam, and how Islam historically elevated the status of women and recognized their equal humanity and equality in their duties, responsibilities and rights.** The actions of these extremists and terrorists groups are **feeding Islamophobia which neglects the diversity of a religion with 1.6 billion adherents — including many who are champions of tolerance and human rights.**

The leadership role of the OIC, it's member states, faith based organizations and community leaders is critical to counter extremism and protect and extend support to these victims to help them rebuild their lives.

UN Women has been **effectively engaging and partnering with faith based organizations to advance women's empowerment and to combat violence** against women. This partnership has been instrumental in our work in **Egypt, Nigeria, South Asia and in the Balkans.**

We also know from first-hand experience that in **contexts of conflict and disasters women face heightened vulnerability, including lack of access to basic services and increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence.**

Amongst the millions **displaced** due to conflict and natural disasters many family units have become **female-headed households** as a result of ongoing crises. Women struggle to find a source of income to provide for themselves and their families.

UN Women has up-scaled its support to humanitarian response and resilience building in a number of contexts including Palestine, South Sudan, Syrian crisis, the Pacific, southeast Asia and Vietnam, but the high needs and heightened vulnerability amongst women and girls across the various ongoing crisis is unmatched and require our attention.

Looking forward to the post 2015 development agenda

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The opportunity of this fifth session of the OIC conference is unique. The momentum generated by the important global inter-governmental processes ahead of us and that will result —in September 2015 — in the adoption of a new development framework and the sustainable development goals, has given all of us, the international community, the golden opportunity to go forward and expand our vision of the transformative nature of gender equality, ensuring human rights standards and principles are firmly integrated into the next people-centred, equitable and truly sustainable and transformative development framework. We owe it to the next generation.

The Open Working Group included in its recommendations for the new sustainable development goals, a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment, addressing the underlying structural constraints to achieving gender equality, with strong targets on:

- ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women,
- recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work, through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family;
- ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.
- Also with the gender goal, the OWG recommended undertaking reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources all of which is extremely relevant to the elimination of poverty and discrimination.

But beyond the gender goal, the inclusion of strong gender-related targets under other goals in the proposal is critical for the achievement of all sustainable development goals. **We have a real, once-in-a-generation opportunity to achieve gender equality and to this aim it is especially critical that the ambition of the gender equality goal is matched by equally ambitious means of implementation.**

We count on your continued support and advocacy to ensure that the final goals and targets of the Post 2015 development agenda are meaningful and measurable; to ensure increasing and adequate funding for their implementation, including through the adequate national and foreign resources mobilization and allocation; and to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize global partnership for sustainable development.

We count on your leadership to ensure a strong accountability framework, including accountability of the private sector, as well as mechanisms at the international, national and local levels. Civil society organizations have a central role in multi-stakeholder accountability.

Together we must ensure that the new transformative development agenda brings social justice and an end to violence and discrimination in every sphere of life. Women and girls deserve nothing less.

Whether we are talking about the post 2015 agenda, or peace and security, or economic growth, or justice and democracy, or sustainable development, **there is one fact that is undeniable. We will stand a better chance of finding solutions if we fully tap into the wisdom, knowledge and capabilities of the entire population. Now is the time for women's empowerment, equality and full participation in society.**

UN Women looks forward to strengthened collaboration with your countries and with the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation to advance rights and opportunity for all.

Never before has there been such strong recognition that gender equality and women's empowerment is an enabler and force multiplier and a transformative force for sustainable development, peace and security resilience and the fulfillment of human rights.

Let seize this opportunity. We must not take small steps. We need big leaps forward with our joint commitment to advance women's rights, women's empowerment and gender equality.

I thank you.