

JOINT STATEMENT ON

# Accelerating progress on the MDGs for women and girls

We, the undersigned Heads of United Nations system organizations and bodies, recognize the important role of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment as a global priority. Important progress has been made in achieving the MDGs for women and girls, particularly in areas such as improving girls' enrolments in primary education, increasing the proportion of women in national parliaments and increasing access to antiretroviral treatment for women living with HIV. We recognize the significant commitments and policy actions taken by many stakeholders to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the implementation of the MDGs.

We are, however, deeply concerned that overall progress for women and girls on the MDGs remains unacceptably slow and uneven. Thirty-one million girls of primary school age and 34 million girls of lower secondary school age are not in school, and an estimated 17 million girls will never enroll in school due to factors such as safety concerns and social, cultural and economic barriers. Women are more likely than men to have jobs that are characterized by poor pay, precariousness and many women lack basic rights such as equal remuneration for work of equal value, as well as a lack of access to social protection including health insurance, unemployment benefits and pensions. In rural areas, women have less access than men to productive resources such as land, agricultural inputs, services and markets, which in turn leads to lower agricultural productivity and food insecurity.

Globally, around 70 million women aged 20 to 24, or one in three, marry before the age of 18. Almost 800 women die every day due to complications during childbirth and pregnancy. There are an estimated 222 million women who want to delay or avoid pregnancy, but are not using modern family planning, largely because they don't have access to it. Too many women and girls are denied their sexual and reproductive health and rights. More than one third of women worldwide have experienced either intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. With young women particularly vulnerable to HIV infection, HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death worldwide for women of reproductive age (15 to 49), significantly contributing to maternal deaths and ill-health. Many women and girls remain without access to basic sanitation, which affects their dignity, health and safety. Globally, only one in five parliamentarians is a woman. There remains a gender gap in access to information and communication technologies and women are under-represented in the media.

The most marginalized groups of women and girls and those who experience multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination are being left behind. Data from 57 countries shows that girls in the poorest 20 per cent of households have the least chance of getting an education and are over three times more likely to be out of school than girls in the highest income quintile. Women living in rural areas fare worse than their male counterparts, as well as women and men living in urban areas, on MDG indicators for which data are available. Due to the persistence of gender inequalities, women and girls often benefit less from urbanization and the urban space than men and boys. Women and girls living in slums often experience disadvantages due to the greater concentration of poverty in slum settlements aggravated by overcrowding, insecurity, insecure tenure, water and sanitation, as well as lack of access to transport, and sexual and reproductive health services. Despite their increased risk of HIV infection, transgender women and women who use drugs or engage in sex work face significant barriers in accessing life-saving HIV services due to stigma and punitive laws. Indigenous girls and women face disproportionately high rates of poverty, are less likely to get an education and often face higher rates of violence than other segments of the population. Food, financial, economic and job crises have increased vulnerabilities and inequalities, often with disproportionate and adverse impacts on women and girls. The MDGs are also least likely to be achieved for women and girls in countries affected by conflict and disasters.

We recognize that several dimensions of gender inequality, particularly some key structural barriers, were not covered by the MDGs, including violence against women and girls, violations of sexual and reproductive health and rights, the unequal division of unpaid care work, the gender remuneration gap, unequal access to assets and productive resources, women's lack of participation in decision-making at all levels and the persistence of discriminatory laws. Achieving our shared goal of gender equality will require the realization of the full spectrum of women's and girls' human rights in line with global norms and international human rights standards. Urgent efforts will be needed to address unequal power relations between women and men and to transform discriminatory laws, social norms, practices and stereotypes. This includes ensuring that culture is never invoked to justify the infringement on, or limitation of, human rights, and that the views and rights of all individuals are equally respected and valued.

We emphasize that gender equality is fundamental to realizing human rights for all, creating peace and socially inclusive and sustainable development trajectories where the benefits of development are equitably shared. Gender equality is a means for accelerating progress on all MDG targets, for example eradicating poverty, reducing maternal, newborn and child mortality, reversing HIV and ending hunger. At the same time, progress in achieving all the MDGs, for example improved access to water and sanitation, and achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all, promotes gender equality. The gains therefore from investing in gender equality are substantial, both to women and girls themselves, and to societies more broadly. The cost of not acting is also immense. Every day women's and girls' lives are being lost, their aspirations and potential are not fulfilled, and they are unnecessarily being exposed to violence, and a number of health risks, which has social and economic implications for current and future generations.

The post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals must build on the lessons of the MDGs. The future framework needs to be bold, ambitious, and universal, and it must foster transformation in gender relations by addressing the structural barriers that hold women and girls back from realizing their rights. The new framework must address multiple forms of discrimination against women and girls, including on the basis of gender, age, marital status, education, income, location, race, ethnicity, religion, political opinion, disability, health status, sexual orientation and gender identity. Specific mechanisms to hold all duty bearers accountable for agreed upon goals must be established. We stand ready to work with Member States to achieve a strong focus on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment in the post-2015 development agenda.

An enabling environment for gender equality is needed. This must include the political will and accordant financial commitment to create gender-responsive institutions across all sectors, strong governance and accountability systems at global, regional, national and local levels; and economic, social and environmental policies that promote substantive equality for women and girls. The full and effective participation of women and girls is critical at all levels of decision-making to shape and influence policies and hold all stakeholders to account.

We call upon all governments to comply with obligations as outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, relevant International Labour Standards, including the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) and other human rights treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The post-2015 framework must not detract from, or dilute, these universal human rights standards. We also call on governments to implement, with adequate resources, the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

We, as leaders of the United Nations system, are committed to work together with all stakeholders to accelerate efforts to achieve a just and equal world where all women and girls live their lives free from discrimination, violence, fear, ignorance, want and deprivation of any kind.

Executive Director UN Women



Administrator, UNDP



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Executive Director, UN-Habitat



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