

“The outcomes of CSW61 are important building blocks”— Executive Director

Closing remarks by United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka, to the 61st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

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[At the beginning of the address a short film was shown, “Alem”, a prize-winner in the “Her story challenge”, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2017.]

We are all “Alem”. This short film illustrates the significance of the work that we have done together, and the agreements we have reached. We are taking steps to make sure that Alem and her brothers will have equal opportunities, that her mother will understand that all the children need her support, and that she needs support too. The father’s employer will make sure that he can be home, so that maybe the father can take the baby outside, allowing Alem and her two brothers to sit and enjoy the scholarship application movie. Investment in infrastructure for energy, or water and sanitation will reduce the responsibility of care on the mother who we saw doing washing outside, so that she too has an opportunity to earn a living if she chooses to outside the home, and the overall quality of life of the family is enhanced. This is what we are trying to do. This is the story that this short film presents.

So, Chair, thank you for your sleepless nights; you were in a way supporting Alem.

Madame Facilitator, thank you for your hard work, your wit, your charm, your steadfastness, thank you so much for being the pilot who has taken us this far.

A special thank you too to the team that supported you. A special thanks to the UN Women team that worked day and night with you: to Ms. Lakshmi Puri, to Christine Brautigam, as well as the rest of the team. And of course, thanks to the wonderful delegates who worked, compromised, got exhausted, had coffee, and persevered.

Thanks too, to civil society, who waited outside, interrupted, assisted us to think out of the box and made sure that we stayed awake and saw it through.

I thank also all the Ministers who came from capitals, some of whom are still here. I know that we have created more work for the Ministers responsible for gender and women, but I think this is the kind of work that you enjoy, and you appreciate the fact that we have given you some tools to make your work easier.

I thank ILO, who has assisted us right from the start of preparing for this CSW, providing us with technical support, and research. In so many ways they have been with us along the journey to this moment. Thank you also to UNFPA, for the support that they always give us during each CSW. We are also grateful for the support from the Office of the Secretary-General.

We have made great progress in this CSW. We certainly know that a CSW alone does not answer all of the questions that need to be answered; it does not give us all of the tools that we need. But what we did not produce in this CSW, you will create elsewhere, to enhance the formidable gains that you have made here, in a strategic manner.

Thank you for also affirming the importance of framing documents, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, CEDAW, ICPD, the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the recognition of the importance of relevant ILO standards that relate to the realization of women's rights to work and women's economic empowerment, and of course the decent work agenda of the ILO and the 1998 Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

The 2030 Agenda, in particular, received a lot of attention in the deliberations. The outcomes of CSW61 are important building blocks in our journey that will ensure that 2030 will be a year when we achieve substantive equality. Sometimes when we get carried away we say that it is an expiry date for gender equality. Don't blame us for that; we are impatient.

The Commission has recognized the importance of removing structural barriers to women's economic empowerment, including ending all forms of violence against women; and harassment of women and girls everywhere, be it in the public or private space. We have recognized that violence against women is an impediment to full equality, as well as to women's economic empowerment. We also recognized the importance of ensuring that all of the structural impediments to women's economic empowerment are addressed, both in the formal context in the public sector as well as in the private sector. We have to start at home, by ensuring that there is an enabling environment for women's economic justice and women's empowerment.

You have made sure that we visit the issue of care and ensured that we create the conditions right from home, where "Alem" can watch the scholarship application movie and the boys can also have the opportunity to hold the baby—an opportunity that is really nice for everybody.

You have made sure that we raise the issue of investment in social infrastructure that enables countries to be effective in the manner in which they create sustained support for women. You have also addressed the issue of equal pay and made sure that unequal pay as an injustice is addressed effectively. At this point, the gender pay gap is at 23 per cent globally, and going forward we hope that every year we will be able to report that it is not going up, but going down. You have also been able to address the issue of minimum and living wage, understanding that the majority of women are at the base of the pyramid. That means that the feminization of poverty can only be addressed if more women are to rise up the ladder of economic participation, so that women are not forever stuck to the "sticky floors".

You also addressed the importance of data and statistics, without which we would not be able to address adequately the progress—or sometimes the setbacks—that we meet along the way. You highlighted the importance of women's voices and decision-making in every place where decisions are made about them, or that will either hinder or encourage their economic benefits. We raised the issue of participation of women at policy-making levels as well as in associations that address economic well-being, including trade unions. We highlighted the contribution of civil society and appreciated the role that civil society plays. We know that although the appreciation of civil society may be modest in these conclusions, they play a significant and far-reaching role in ensuring this agenda moves forward.

You recognized the importance of gender-aware climate-change response, the importance of gender-aware macro-economic policies and tax policies, the importance of education in STEM subjects and making sure that women are ready to participate, especially in the digital economy.

We looked at the importance of investment in the women's agenda, including the availability of domestic resources for investment in the 2030 Agenda and more ODA directed to the agenda for women's equality as well as women's economic empowerment.

You highlighted the importance of legislation that addresses the barriers that limit women's economic empowerment and the norms that hinder and impact negatively on the positive laws that are advancing women's economic empowerment. We must overall make sure that work, works for women. That women do not go to work and come back even more disadvantaged. Hard work for women should mean a better life for women and that the face of poverty should not be the face of a woman—not that we wish it to be the face of a man—we wish for poverty to be ended, period.

We also made sure that the impact of the structures that hinder economic progress were viewed from the perspective of their impact on women migrants and refugees, older women, women living with disability, and indigenous women and girls, discussing different intersectionalities that limit many women, including those discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. You made sure equality is for all women wherever they are and whoever they are. This is a message about leaving no one behind. You recognized the generation with the largest number of young people ever in history. Policies must ensure that reflect women and girls to have a much better life and are prepared for their entry into the labour market with an education that is tune with the work opportunities they expect.

You highlighted the plight of women in the informal sector who have no social protection and therefore the importance of social reform. You also highlighted the opportunities that would make the global economy grow and be inclusive. By 2025, according to McKinsey's research, even before the Agenda 2030 end date, there is a chance for the global economy to earn USD 28 trillion if we take certain measures to end gender and economic inequality. This would prevent the possible threat highlighted by the World Economic Forum: that equality will take 170 years if we do not take the measures outlined today.

Thank you for all the work to put us on track and the side events that gave us so much food for thought. There were more than 3,900 civil society participants at CSW, 89 ministers and 162 Member States that participated in this CSW, all of which was very energizing. The Secretary-General also addressed civil society, in addition to opening the formal session of the CSW. In one side event, the Secretary-General made his own commitments in addition to the work that he does: he will never again sit in a forum or participate in a panel that is men only. So, no more "manels". He also committed that whenever he visits any country, he will always take time to meet with women and to take stock for himself on the progress on the women's agenda. So, whenever the Secretary-General visits, you must know that he is looking after you. He also committed to gender parity, as you know, which is one of his key priorities within the UN.

So, all in all, everybody has homework, from the Secretary-General, to ourselves sitting here, to all of you over there, let's go out and be our best.

Thank you.

- See more at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/3/speech-ed-phumzile-mlambo-ngcuka-closing-of-csw61#sthash.nsNIDJIX.dpuf>