

**Statement by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director UN-Women to the Joint Meeting of the Boards  
May 29, 2020**

[As delivered]

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a true test for the UN system and an affirmation of solidarity and our shared values. The central role of gender equality has been highlighted for all of us, just as much as the disregard for gender equality has been simultaneously exposed in the different responses that we have also seen in different places.

There are many examples of a coordinated response at global, regional and country level that have enabled us to identify best practice that we can follow and amplify as we go forward.

The Secretary-General's early brief on gender and COVID-19 and his call to action for ending violence against women clearly show the UN's commitment at the highest level.

UN Women together with sister entities joined the ASG-level task force to develop the COVID-19 socio-economic response framework, which profiles pervasive gender inequality, with gender equality in all contexts. How that risks backsliding on the SDGs has also been exposed.

The Multi Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) launched to support this framework has adopted a mandatory gender marker. Eighty-three per cent of applicants to the first call of the Fund indicated a desire to contribute significantly to gender equality, which is something we obviously need to follow and verify in order to ensure adherence at an implementation level.

We have stressed the vital importance of gender-disaggregated data for solid, evidence-based development of national response plans. Under the aegis of the MPTF, the Women Count platform will soon become the "go-to" data hub by aggregating data from the other UN agencies, including ILO, UNICEF and UNDP.

At the country level, under Resident Coordinator leadership, UN Women has partnered with UNDP and the UNCTs to conduct rapid assessments of COVID-19's socio-economic impact in over 30 countries already in all regions.

We have also worked with ILO to develop a fiscal stimulus tool to influence government economic stimulus packages to be gender-responsive.

We have raised the alarm on the dramatic growth in gender-based violence (GBV) during the pandemic and showed how GBV is a 'shadow pandemic'. In the EU-UN Spotlight initiative, where UNFPA, UNDP and UN Women are the lead agencies, we have identified important ways of using our existing resources to address this surge. And we have also collectively supported and enabled NGOs to be agile.

Supporting frontline GBV service providers and strengthening helplines and developing innovative technological solutions has also helped urgent response to the calls and the needs of survivors who are seeking safety and support. We are advocating that governments treat domestic violence services as essential services – and if there is a country that has not done that yet we are urging that you do so; supporting shelters to implement physical distancing while providing much-needed assistance, which

has been tricky but not impossible. We have been working with hotels to have empty rooms donated for safe spaces for women, with taxi services to transport survivors in times of need.

We also have been concerned by, and are taking action to address, the spike of violence against girls, as well as the spike in child marriage and trafficking of girls while the schools are closed. If left unaddressed, this will undo the painstaking efforts towards progress that we have made in girls' education.

In closing, we still have much to accomplish as the UN System, but I think a start has been made and we have not allowed the crisis to deter us. Instead, we have ensured the crisis propels us. I look forward to continuing to build better and together. In my book, building better means that we hardwire women's economic empowerment, climate-smart agriculture, ending racism and homophobia, and addressing infrastructure deprivation – including in digital infrastructure, WASH infrastructure and public modes such as education and health services – with gender equality at the heart of our collective response.

Thank you.