

Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the First Meeting of the Executive Board of UN Women, January 24, 2011

Thank you, Madam President, and thank you, Executive Director Bachelet, for your important and inspiring statement this morning.

I'm delighted to address this first session of the Executive Board of UN Women. As we begin our work today, I hope we will all remain mindful of the thousands if not millions who have come before us, working with tireless dedication to empower women and advance their rights, in these chambers and around the world. I am reminded, too, of women I have met from every corner of the world who have overcome tyranny, discrimination, and personal tragedy to inspire the next generation of women leaders. We gather today in their honor. And we can thank them best by furthering the causes for which they gave so much.

With the creation of UN Women, for the first time in the UN's 65-year history, member states voted to put women's challenges and opportunities at their rightful place at the forefront of the UN's mission. This commitment is not simply about equality and fairness. Empowering women is a precondition for development, prosperity, and security. The economic and social well-being of nations depends upon their women. So does their stability.

Madam President, as we can all attest, UN Women represents the culmination of a reform process that lasted several years. A broad coalition of member states worked together to establish this new organization; the international community has embraced it and greeted it with high hopes. We too hope that this enthusiasm and goodwill will guide the work of this Executive Board as it moves to define the organization and guide our efforts to improve the lives of women, their families, and their communities.

The United States is deeply committed to ensuring this organization's success. We are grateful that so many countries with strong records of

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upholding women's rights have agreed to serve on the Executive Board. For our own part, we are proud to hold a "Major Contributors" seat on the initial Board, and we intend to maintain a strong, constructive, and continued presence here.

We are also simply delighted that the distinguished former President of Chile, Michelle Bachelet, has agreed to serve as the first Executive Director of UN Women. With her deep knowledge, her commitment to improving the lives of women and children, and her demonstrated ability to build consensus, she is the ideal person to lead this new agency. Madam Executive Director, under your leadership, UN Women has the potential to become one of the UN agencies that most directly improves the lives of people all around the world.

During your statement this morning, you laid out a compelling vision for UN Women's priorities. The United States supports your objectives of mainstreaming gender concerns throughout the UN system, improving accountability, and strengthening reporting on women's issues at the global, national and regional levels. We share your abiding commitment to ending rape, sexual abuse, and violence against women and promoting women's economic empowerment. We are also deeply committed to defending women's civil and political rights, and as such, we will look to UN Women for leadership in combating discrimination that hinders women and girls' access to education, health care, employment, and justice—the type of discrimination that robs women and their communities of full participation in public life and public service.

The United States also welcomes UN Women's commitment to increasing the role of women in promoting peace and security—and to ensuring the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325. We are pleased that Executive Director Bachelet continues to consult

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with senior UN officials, member states, and civil society to explore ways to move forward together here.

Madam President, one of the fundamental challenges that UN Women faces will be translating our discussions in New York of norms, action plans, strategies, and campaigns into practical gains and tangible results for women around the world. We look to UN Women to hold us all accountable for fulfilling the stirring promises made in Beijing 15 years ago.

To do so, UN Women will need more than a strong headquarters. It will need strong capacities on the ground. The organization must increase its capacities at national levels so that its field officers can help governments throughout the world enact policies and programs that most help real people. This will require a phased expansion of UN Women's field presence beyond the countries in which UNIFEM was located.

Executive Director Bachelet has stressed that, to achieve its core objectives, UN Women will need substantially more resources, beyond its current \$200 million dollar budget. Some of this will need to come from traditional donor governments, but we also welcome her plans to have UN Women obtain much of its total resources from the private sector, as well as countries not traditionally considered "donors." The United States supports Executive Director Bachelet's innovative approach and her call for governments, foundations, and corporate partners to work together to find the finances that UN Women needs.

In these challenging economic times, it is especially important to demonstrate results and to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent as efficiently as possible. We commend the attention that UN Women's management team is giving to creating effective internal-review processes, and we hope that the organization will serve as a model of transparency and accountability for other UN funds and programs.

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The United States welcomes the progress that Executive Director Bachelet and her interim management team have already made in standing up the organization, particularly in developing UN Women's budget, organizational chart, and internal Rules of Procedure. We look forward to seeing these plans develop further as her senior management team is put in place.

One of the most urgent tasks facing UN Women's Board during our inaugural session will be adopting a transitional budget. Without this budget, UN Women will not be able to appoint its two Assistant Secretary-Generals, hire other needed staff, or strengthen country and regional offices—all tasks that must be accomplished as soon as possible for UN Women to become fully operational. We cannot wait for the annual Board meeting in June when UN Women will present its first annual plan.

Madam President, Executive Director Bachelet, distinguished colleagues, this is a historic moment. As a board, we have a solemn responsibility to do everything in our power to ensure this organization's success. Under Executive Director Bachelet's leadership, UN Women is already off to an impressive start. The next six months will be critical to its long-term success. The United States looks forward to a collaborative and productive relationship with UN Women's management team and its Board. And we will continue to work together for a world where women and girls can fulfill their own potential, enjoy full rights, and play a central role in national growth and development.

Thank you Madam President.