

**Statement by the United Nations Country Team in Myanmar  
2019 International Women's Day: "Think equal, build smart, innovate for change"  
8 March 2019, Yangon**

Investing in women is the most effective way to lift families, communities, businesses, and countries. Women's participation makes peace agreements stronger, societies more resilient and economic growth more sustainable. Empowering women will benefit us all.

As the women's rights movement is making significant advances around the world, we in Myanmar also "think equal, build smart, innovate for change," as is suggested in the theme of the 2019 International Women's Day.

Today, we celebrate women in Myanmar as industry leaders, social entrepreneurs, activists, scientists, artists and innovators. We also acknowledge the remarkable strength of the women who have been displaced and the survivors of gender-based violence for their resilience as they continue to contribute to their family, community and the country.

On this occasion, we are also looking at how we can support the Government of the Union of Myanmar in creating conditions for women to increase their impact on the ongoing transitions from conflict to peace, from military rule to democratic governance, and from a closed to a liberalized economy.

**Women Can Strengthen the Peace Process**

The Myanmar Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement together with the Framework for Political Dialogue paved the way for women to be better represented in the peace process. The progress has been promising. At the third Panglong conference in 2018 the proportion of women had increased to around 20 per cent. Continued progress is needed to reach the recommended minimum of 30 per cent female participation in peace talks, as outlined in the government's strategy. Research shows that the strong influence of women in the negotiations correlates with a higher likelihood of successfully implementing peace agreements. The UN is working with the government, CSOs and other actors to ensure that women and girls have a greater influence in building sustainable peace. We are providing technical assistance and capacity strengthening to the Union and State Governments; promoting advocacy efforts and alliance building among women's CSOs; and implementing targeted programming to empower and protect conflict- and crisis-affected women, including through the sexual violence in conflict agenda. Geographically, these activities are carried out mainly in Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, northern Shan and Rakhine states. As we consider peace a priority, just like the government, we are open to expand our programmes.

**Women Essential for Democratic Transition**

Women's participation is a key indicator for the strength of a democracy. The 2015 elections saw significant increase in women in political leadership as the number of elected women parliamentarians has doubled to 13 per cent. The composition of the Myanmar civil service is now close to gender parity, but the decision-making structures and leadership are male-dominated. Only 1.5 per cent of senior civil service positions are occupied by women. At the local level, the gender imbalance in the leadership is most visible as women make up only 0.25 per cent of ward or village tract administrators. To promote greater participation of women in leadership across all levels of government, the UN is helping to implement the National Strategic Action Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2022). We are focusing on the provision of gender-responsive laws, policies, programmes, statistics and budgets including through the roll-out of gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting principles across all ministries. We are also supporting the efforts to introduce measures to enable

women's equal participation from the level of civil servants, village tract and township administrators, and members of parliament, to electoral candidates and voters.

### **Women Can Unlock Myanmar's Economic Potential**

With the rapid strides in economic growth, we need to ensure that women are not left behind. Today, only half of women are in the labour force, compared to 85.6 per cent of men. Women are paid less and most work in the informal sector, or in low-paying, low-status jobs. Many migrate for employment and are in vulnerable and unprotected forms of domestic work. They are constrained by lack of access to assets and resources. Most of the unpaid and care work disproportionately falls on the shoulders of women. Yet women can also hold the key to boosting economic growth. By realizing the potential of women and enabling their entry into the labour market, Myanmar can generate its own brand of economic growth driven by a gender dividend. The gender dividend can be unlocked by creating jobs. But for this to happen, women need equal rights to education, health-care, credit, land, and decision-making positions. The UN has taken steps to support the Government to promote women's access to decent, safe, fair and quality work. We are also supporting programmes preventing and mitigating human trafficking and other forms of violence against women, including working women. However, more needs to be done and we are prepared to help.

Women and girls are as much part of the Myanmar's future as men and boys. We are part of the movement for women's rights and empowerment. We stand with women, listen to them and learn from them. We are ready to step up our cooperation, build smart and innovate for change in partnership with the government. We think equal and we are committed to achieve gender parity latest by 2030.

***United Nations Country Team in Myanmar***

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