**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL REMARKS TO THE OPENING OF THE 69TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**New York, 10 March 2025**

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, dear friends,

Allow me a particular word of welcome to our friends from civil society – you drive gender equality forward...

In the face of immense obstacles, you strive to make our societies more just, more fair, more representative – and as a result more resilient and more prosperous for everyone.

I salute you and I thank you.

Excellencies, dear Friends,

We gather as the world marks thirty years since countries convened in Beijing…

Reaffirmed women’s rights as human rights…

And promised and I quote, “Equality, development and peace for all women, everywhere”.

Of course, we always knew that would never happen overnight – or even over years.

But three decades on, that promise feels more distant than we might ever have imagined.

Women’s rights are under siege. The poison of patriarchy is back – and it is back with a vengeance:

Slamming the brakes on action; tearing-up progress; and mutating into new and dangerous forms.

But there is an antidote.

That antidote is action.

Now is the time for those of us who care about equality for women and girls to stand up and to speak out.

Now is the time for the world to accelerate progress and deliver on the promise of Beijing.

Excellencies, dear Friends,

In the past thirty years, the world has moved forward:

In boosting girls’ education, cutting maternal mortality, increasing legal protections, and more.

But immense gaps persist.

Age-old horrors like violence, discrimination, and economic inequality are rife.

The gender pay gap still stands at twenty percent.

Globally, almost one in three women have been subject to violence.

And horrific sexual violence in conflict is happening from Haiti to Sudan.

In many countries, women and girls are still denied the most basic of rights:

The right not to be raped by your husband...

The right to own property or confer citizenship on an equal footing with men, or to access credit without your husband’s permission.

And around the world, hard-won gains are being thrown into reverse:

Reproductive rights are under attack, and equality initiatives discarded.

In Afghanistan, women and girls have been stripped of their most basic rights – forbidden even from raising their voices in public.

Meanwhile, new technologies – including Artificial Intelligence – are creating the conditions to allow new platforms for violence and abuse, normalizing misogyny and online revenge.

Up to 95 per cent of all online deepfakes are non-consensual pornographic images. 90 per cent depict women.

And unequal access to technologies inflames existing inequalities.

Excellencies, dear friends,

Why have we not come further?

No doubt, global crises have hampered progress:

COVID-19 saw a swell of violence against women and girls, and labour market participation fall.

The debt crisis is draining funds and shrinking fiscal space for programmes of gender equality.

Escalating climate disasters are hitting women and girls hardest.

And equality for women and girls is a casualty of surging conflicts around the world.

Yet, global crises are not the only obstacles.

New laws on the books have not been matched by investments to make them real on the ground …

Nor have they universally been grounded in international human rights standards and principles.

Discriminatory norms endure …

Political will is often weak…

So is accountability.

Funding for women’s human rights organisations has nose-dived.

Civic space is shrinking.

Women’s rights defenders increasingly face harassment and threats.

And around the world, the masters of misogyny are gaining in strength, confidence and influence.

We see it in the bile hurled at women online.

We see it in attempts to gut women’s human rights and fundamental freedoms.

And we see it in the leaders happy to throw equality to the wolves.

Dear Friends,

Equality for women and girls is a human right.

It is a matter of justice.

It is the foundation of sustainable development and lasting peace.

And it is essential for humanity.

By ensuring access to quality education for girls, and opening the doors of opportunity to decent work for women, we kick-start economic growth and we forge stronger economies.

And by giving women and girls their rightful seat at the table, we boost our chances of solving immense challenges – from climate to conflict.

So how do we accelerate progress?

First — by boosting sustainable finance for sustainable development – to deliver sustainable funding for women’s equality.

The Pact for the Future, agreed last year, takes bold strides forward.

The rights of women and girls run through the Pact.

I urge all countries to deliver its commitments in full…

And to prioritize investments in gender equality:

Investments in education and training…

Investments in economic empowerment – including adequate pay and pensions for care givers – the majority of whom are women…

And investments to eradicate all forms of violence and harassment – the United Nations’ Spotlight Initiative shows what a difference they can make.

Second – we need to step-up support for women’s organizations.

They play a vital role in accountability – in pushing progress, defending rights, and ensuring women and girls – and their interests – are heard.

We need governments to expand the space for civil society.

And to protect women’s human rights defenders, and ensure those threatening them are brought to justice.

We must also strengthen institutional accountability mechanisms within governments to drive progress.

Third – we need action on technology:

The Global Digital Compact commits to action for women and girls:

To encourage their leadership…

To correct gender-biased data…

To address and eliminate all forms of violence using digital technologies…

To ensure capacity-building initiatives are targeted and tailored to women and girls…

And to promote their participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Fourth, we need to guarantee women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in peacebuilding.

This is a proven path to more enduring solutions – as recognized by UN Security Council resolution 1325, adopted twenty-five years ago.

The Pact for the Future commits to integrate women in all aspects of conflict prevention, and building and sustaining peace. This must be honoured.

Finally, we need action to ensure women’s full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in decision-making – at every level and all walks of life.

We need women leading in government and policy-making – a tried and tested means of improving health, education, and childcare, and of tackling violence against women and girls.

And we need women leading in business.

We know what works: temporary special measures, such as quotas, targeted appointments, and parity goals must help and countries and companies should use them.

I speak from experience.

The United Nations has led by example.

For the first time in history, we achieved and maintained gender parity among senior leadership at headquarters and around the world.

And we did this in a very elementary way: we expanded the search for qualified candidates.

We never compromised on competence.

We simply leveled the playing field.

And we discovered a core truth: a rising pool of talent lifts all boats.

Dear Friends,

The United Nations is stronger today because we are more representative of the world we serve.

And we are determined to do even more to deliver for the world’s women and girls.

The Pact for the Future includes commitments to revitalize the Commission on the Status of Women to promote implementation of the Platform for Action.

And our system-wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan aims to actively advance gender equality – and the human rights of all women and girls – through every aspect of our work.

That includes a Clarion Call across the organisation to address pushbacks on gender equality and protect women human rights defenders…

And a commitment to help raise $300 million for women’s organizations in conflict and crisis settings.

We know all of this is an investment not just for women, not just for girls, but for all humanity.

Excellencies, dear Friends,

In these perilous times for women’s rights we must rally around the Beijing Declaration.

Recommit to the Platform for Action.

And stand firm in making the promise of rights, equality and empowerment a reality for every woman and girl around the world.

Thank you.