

**Summary of the remarks by Under-Secretary-General of the UN and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka at the opening of the 65th Commission on the Status of Women on March 15, 2021** by Ms. Irene Gashu (Aichi Branch, JAUW)

**Priority Theme: Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been especially hard on women and girls. Emerging from this crisis we are facing more orphans and child-headed homes. There are 10 million more girls this decade anticipated to be at risk of child marriage, and girls permanently dropping out of school because of pregnancy – in the main from non-consensual sex. Women are having to spend even more time on unpaid care and domestic work since the pandemic. Two-thirds of the jobs lost are women's jobs. 47 million more women this year will be pushed into living on less than USD 1.90 a day. In addition, we face the digital gender gap that leaves women unprepared for the future.

Throughout 2020, UN Women has raised the alarm on the increase of gender-based violence at home during lockdowns. The Secretary-General's report for this session underlines that violence against women in public life is a major deterrent to their political participation. At this session you can propose Agreed Conclusions that take us forward. Your conclusions on this year's priority theme have the potential to stop regression, refocus priorities and move the whole agenda forward by making sure that women are at the high table.

It is inconceivable that we can address this situation without the women taking part in decision-making. We currently confront two big challenges: the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate change crisis. In both, women are disproportionately affected. And in neither, are women appropriately represented as negotiators and policy makers. In a recent survey of COVID-19 task forces, we found that less than 5 per cent of those task forces had gender parity in the composition of their membership. This gives men the impossible task of making the right decisions about women without the benefit of women's insights.

Other reports tell us that in key public sectors, men continue to hold most of the

leadership positions – as high as 70 per cent - marking no change over the previous year. In the private sector the situation is even worse. Women remain deeply under-represented in news media both as editors controlling content and perspective, and as subject matter experts. Excellencies, in this session you can make your impatience known. You can propel progress.

We have encouragement for this from civil society and increasingly also from the private sector. Civil society has been working very hard for this progress. The most important aspect is to institute special measures, like well-designed and effectively implemented gender quotas and targets. There are currently 13 countries in which women hold 50 per cent or more of ministerial positions. This is something we can address because 13 is far too low.

Change is possible. We today celebrate gains made in Estonia, Lithuania, Rwanda, the United States, Nicaragua and Mongolia. The premise of this year's priority theme is that it is not acceptable that institutions which are predominantly male-dominated should decide on matters that affect women's lives and concern the lives of all of humanity. In another governance situation this would not be considered ethical for stakeholders to have little or no say in the decisions and policies that concern them. I urge you to take action to include young women in decision-making, especially those who are affected by age barriers when it comes to entry into public office. We see them in the streets of the world, leading movements and facing lethal force. These are the leaders of today and tomorrow, their indisputable capacity to lead has been demonstrated. We must make space for them – and all women – so they can take their rightful places. Let this be a defining session in a time of crisis to propel gender equality and end the discrimination against women and girls. It is in your hands. Thank you.