



Entidad de las Naciones Unidas para la Igualdad  
de Género y el Empoderamiento de las Mujeres

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Día Internacional de la Mujer

## UN commemoration of International Women's Day 2014: Speech by UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

***Speech by UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka at the UN commemoration of International Women's Day 2014, UN Headquarters, New York, 7 March 2014***

**Date:** 07 March 2014

*[Check against delivery]*

Your Excellency, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General,  
Your Excellency Mr. John Ashe, President of the General Assembly,  
Your Excellency Ms. Hillary Rodham Clinton,  
Ms. Andrea Nunez, Vice President of the World YWCA Board,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I stand before you, mindful of the historic significance of this day. A day when, more than a century ago, courageous women took to the streets demanding *better working conditions, peace and bread*.

We have come a long way since women made those demands, but we have yet to finish what they started.

Since that day, we have witnessed an unprecedented expansion of women's rights.

More girls are going to school. More women have entered the labour market. More women are in positions of leadership. And women live longer.

A century ago, only two countries allowed women to vote. Today that right is nearly universal, and more than one in five members of parliament is a woman.

Today more than 125 countries have outlawed violence against women, and the constitutions of more than 139 countries guarantee women's rights.

But despite these gains, the world is still under-performing on gender equality, and a large gap remains between laws and their implementation.

One of the milestones of the 20th century in the struggles of women took place 20 years ago when gathered at the Beijing Women's Conference, and one of the memorable moments was an assertion that women's rights are human rights – made by our guest today, Ms. Hillary Rodham Clinton. WE ASSERT THAT CALL YET AGAIN because equality between men and women remains an elusive dream.

The face of poverty is that of a woman.

One in three women worldwide – in rich and poor countries alike – will experience physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. Millions of women and girls are trafficked into modern-day slavery.

Girls are mutilated and sacrificed to so-called child marriage – which is a contradiction in terms – a child cannot marry, and a child cannot be a bride. Yet in the next decade, this harmful practice will claim more than 15 million girls.

This has to cause outrage, because if not, what will? And yet these problems have solutions. The solutions lie in empowering women.

Each one of us must take a stand, cross the line and be on the right side of history, just as many of you did in the struggle against apartheid...as leaders of nations, journalists, sportspersons, business leaders and citizens.

More than 100 years after the first International Women's Day, nearly 20 years after Beijing and 14 years after the MDGs, we stand at a crossroads.

For an injustice afflicting half of the world's people, WE NEED TO take much bigger and bolder steps.

The time is now.

Big ideas can overcome big obstacles. We live in the era of technology that can change lives if deliberately directed to do so. This morning we just launched an initiative with Intel aimed at expanding the digital literacy among girls in Africa called ***She will connect***, targeting 5 million girls, which is focused on social and economic transformation.

Our collaboration within the ICT sector also extends to Microsoft and others. And is also targeted at improving lives of women.

We need to make gender equality an integral part of every aspect of life and of every human endeavour.

There is overwhelming evidence that equality for women is progress for all. It leads to inclusive growth, reduces poverty and inequality and contributes to peace and security.

Gender equality offers the world solutions to the challenges facing our generation especially poverty, inequality and insecurity.

I saw that last month when I visited Syrian and South Sudanese refugees.

Even in the toughest of circumstances... women are working to make peace, to put bread on the table and to earn their own incomes.

Women's voices need to be heard.

The response we need is bigger and bolder actions. So that women's equality CAN BE A game changer for women and girls and for humanity.

Together we can choose to be liberators or risk being footnotes in history.

That bold action is to embed women's rights, women's empowerment and gender equality in all we do, now and beyond 2015 and provide measurements and modalities that will give us significant impact that is also transformative. The 21st century offers an opportunity for a big leap forward – not just baby steps.

The key message that captures what we actually need to do is what I call the **SHE** imperative.

**S** stands for the Security of women and girls from all forms of violence,

**H** stands for her Human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, land rights, equal pay, recognition of unpaid care, and all the rights and opportunities to which she is entitled.

**E** stands for an Empowered decision-making and full leadership and participation in all spheres of life.

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Today, I want to speak directly to men and boys around the world.

Firstly, I commend those of you who have spoken out and stand with women and girls as they hold up half of the sky. We call on all men to also take a stand and hold up their half of the sky to speak out and to take action. Because silence and inaction of good men conspire against women.

In a minute I will unveil our new initiative, where men will call on their brothers, fathers, sons and friends to stand up for their sisters, mothers, daughters and partners in our *He for She* campaign.

This is part of our larger effort leading up to the Beijing+20 commemoration in 2015.

In the *He for She* campaign, I invite you – men and boys of the world – who make up the other half of humanity, to act for change wherever you are, in your streets, your churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, your villages and your cities and be **VISIBLE AND VOCAL**. Visit the website and Join us in the **HeForShe** digital platform which we now present and simultaneously our website goes live.

Greater sustained actions are needed. And more urgent actions. We can and must do better because equality for women is progress for all!