



Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

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Organizational matters

Report on the first regular session 2023, 13 to 14 February 2023¹

I. Election of the Bureau

1. On 10 January 2023, the Executive Board held elections for Bureau members of the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for 2023. The Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, H.E. Sergiy Kyslytsya (representing the Eastern European States), was elected President of the Executive Board. The Vice-Presidents were elected from the following regional groups: (a) Latin American and Caribbean States: H.E. Ms. Leonor Zalabata Torres, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations; (b) Asia-Pacific States: H.E. Mr. Suriya Chindawongse, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations; (c) Western European and Other States: H.E. Mr. Maurizio Massari, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations; and (d) African States: Ms. Nelly Banaken Elél, First Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Cameroon to the United Nations.

2. The outgoing President, H.E. Mr. Muhammad Abdul Muhith, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Bangladesh to the United Nations (representing the Asia-Pacific States), congratulated the incoming President and Vice-Presidents and thanked the Executive Board, particularly the outgoing Vice-Presidents who served during his tenure: H.E. Ms. María del Carmen Squeff, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations (representing the Latin American and Caribbean States); H.E. Mr. Jörundur Valtýsson, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations (representing the Western European and Other States); H.E. Mr. Alhaji Fanday Turay, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations (representing the African States); and H.E. Mr. Sergiy Kyslytsya, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations (representing the Eastern European States).

¹ Note: This document was processed in its entirety by UN-Women.



II. Organizational matters

3. The first regular session 2023 of the Executive Board was held at the United Nations Headquarters, New York, from 13 to 14 February 2023. The Executive Board adopted the annotated provisional agenda and workplan for the first regular session (UNW/2023/L.1/Rev.1) and approved the report on its second regular session 2022 held from 13 to 14 September 2022 (UNW/2022/7). The Executive Board approved the provisional agenda and workplan for the annual session 2023 to be held from 19 to 21 June 2023 (UNW/2023/CRP.1/Rev.1) and adopted the annual workplan for 2023 (UNW/2023/L.2).

4. The Executive Board adopted two decisions: Decision 2023/1 – Financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2021 and report of the Board of Auditors; and Decision 2023/2 – Third-party Joint Assessment on the Governance and Oversight Functions of the Executive Boards, both of which are contained in the annex to the present report.

III. Opening statements

5. The newly elected President of the Executive Board opened the session by stressing the Bureau's continued commitment to strengthening the effectiveness of the Executive Board's oversight function for improved governance while building on the hard work of the previous Bureaux. He also outlined the different reports and briefings to be presented during the first regular session, and the decisions to be negotiated.

6. In her opening statement, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director congratulated the newly elected President and Bureau and thanked last year's President and Vice-Presidents. After expressing her condolences for the tens of thousands of lives lost and the many more injured in the earthquakes in southern Republic of Türkiye and northern Syria, she highlighted that UN-Women is contributing to the response with and through the United Nations system, including through dedicated gender expertise.

7. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director noted that crises continue to exact their highest toll on women and girls. She specifically highlighted that the longer-term effects of COVID-19, the food and energy crisis fuelled by the war in Ukraine, and climate change and climate-driven disasters continue to impact those left furthest behind. She argued that a gender lens is necessary to adapt and mitigate the impact of these crises. The Head of the Entity highlighted the impact of crises on women and girls in Afghanistan and described her recent mission to Afghanistan together with the Deputy Secretary-General. She stressed that UN-Women will continue to raise the voices of women and girls on every platform possible and to use its convening power to safeguard space for Afghan women's voices to be heard. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director added that her mission sought to build the commitment and alignment of regional players, neighbouring countries and stakeholders to reverse the various edicts and bans that have done immense harm to women and girls in Afghanistan since August 2021. She noted that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) plays a crucial role in this regard and announced that UN-Women would be jointly organizing an upcoming conference on women's rights in OIC member States.

8. The Head of the Entity reiterated UN-Women's commitment to "pivot to the field" and to ensure that every aspect of the organization's mandate has a close and explicit link to results for women and girls on the ground. She described UN-Women's activities in Ukraine and Tanzania, and mentioned how the Entity has increasingly

stepped up its delivery of results through joint programmes across the United Nations system, with 31 per cent of 2021 expenditure being achieved via joint programmes, up from 13 per cent in 2018. She shared that the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is off track, including Sustainable Development Goal 5, and that on the current trajectory, gender equality is an estimated 300 years away. She further highlighted how the upcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women will focus on innovation and technology and stressed the need to pursue the most powerful and progressive agreed conclusion as a normative framework that can influence the United Nations Global Digital Compact to transform the lives of women and girls on the ground. In closing, she recognized the Entity's obligation to achieve the greatest possible impact with the resources entrusted by donors and reiterated her commitment to transparency and accountability.

9. After opening the floor, numerous delegations thanked the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director for her comprehensive remarks and congratulated the President and the members of the Bureau on their election. Member States joined the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director in expressing their deepest condolences to families and victims of the earthquake in Republic of Türkiye and Syria. Several speakers highlighted that collective progress on gender equality is increasingly threatened by the combination of increased global instability, geopolitical conflict and accelerating climate change, while concluding that UN-Women's unique triple mandate is more essential than ever. A group of States further stressed the importance of women's economic empowerment and encouraged UN-Women as a development agency to increase its focus on the economic advancement of women. Some speakers commended UN-Women for receiving its eleventh consecutive unqualified audit opinion from the Board of Auditors. A number of Member States stressed the importance of qualitative, predictable and flexible funding to UN-Women that enables the Entity to provide a quick and agile response to emerging crises. Another delegation underscored the importance of using intergovernmentally agreed terminology in UN-Women documents and to provide assistance to States solely upon their request. Finally, delegations welcomed the timely focus on innovation, technological change and the digital age at the upcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

IV. Audit matters

10. In her opening remarks for this item, the Deputy Executive Director welcomed and appreciated the collaborative efforts between the United Nations Board of Auditors and UN-Women. She underscored that the eleventh consecutive unqualified audit opinion by the United Nations Board of Auditors was no small accomplishment for a new agency just entering its twelfth year of existence and noted that it demonstrates UN-Women's strong financial stewardship to safeguard and implement the resources entrusted to it. She highlighted that the Entity received \$681.5 million in total revenue in 2021, the highest sum since its inception. The Deputy Executive Director thanked donors for their ongoing support during these unprecedented times of global crisis and challenging economic outlook. She added that UN-Women will continue to improve its approaches even further on its journey of oversight maturity. As guided by the audit results of the United Nations Board of Auditors, she mentioned that UN-Women has accelerated its business transformation as a core strategic element to drive implementation of its Strategic Plan 2022–2025 and further improved internal management and governance.

11. The United Nations Board of Auditors Representative and Deputy Director of External Audit of the Republic of Chile presented the report of the Board of Auditors on the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2021 ([A/77/5/Add.12](#)). In the opinion of the Board of Auditors, the financial statements presented fairly, in

all material respects, the financial position of UN-Women at 31 December 2021 and its financial performance and cash flows for the year ended on that date, in accordance with the International Public Sector Accounting Standards. In its overall conclusion, the Board of Auditors did not identify significant errors, omissions or misstatements from the review of the financial records of UN-Women for the year ended 31 December 2021. However, it did identify scope for improvement in areas such as programme management, procurement management and human resources, for which it issued 19 recommendations, all of which were accepted by management. Regarding follow-ups to previous recommendations, the Board of Auditors noted that of the 29 outstanding previous recommendations, 21 were fully implemented and eight were being implemented. The Board of Auditors acknowledged UN-Women's efforts to finalize the process for implementing long-standing recommendations and noted that the 72 per cent overall implementation rate during this cycle reflects the solid commitment of the Entity to managing the recommendations arising from the audit process. The Board of Auditors mentioned that there are no pending recommendations prior to 2020.

12. The Deputy Director of Financial Management introduced the financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2021 ([A/77/5/Add.12](#)), with total assets of \$681.5 million. Total expenses were \$530.7 million. The Entity recorded a surplus of \$150.7 million for the year ended 31 December 2021, compared with a surplus of \$96.2 million in 2020. The surplus was mainly due to increased revenue from other resources (non-core), which would be spent on programme expenditure in future years. The delivery rate for 2021 programme expenditure from other resources was 87.7 per cent against a target of 85 per cent. In outlining revenue and expenditure by funding source, it was noted that the increase in voluntary contributions from donors in 2021 of \$146.5 million was represented by an increase in other resources (non-core) of \$93.6 million and an increase in regular resources (core) of \$52.9 million. The Entity's total assets of \$1,205.7 million exceeded total liabilities of \$173.6 million, resulting in total net assets/equity of \$1,032.1 million.

13. The Director of the Strategy, Planning, Resources and Effectiveness Division gave an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors and Executive Board Decisions. She highlighted that as of January 2023, actions had been completed for 17 of 27 outstanding recommendations (63 per cent) and confirmed that UN-Women was on track to complete the remaining 37 per cent of recommendations. Out of the eight remaining recommendations from 2020 and 2021, three had been closed by the Board of Auditors, three are completed management actions and awaiting assessment by the Board of Auditors and two are still in progress. Regarding the implementation status of audit recommendations prior to 2020, actions had been completed for all recommendations, meaning that there were no long outstanding prior recommendations. The Director further highlighted several benefits of implementing audit recommendations, noting they improve UN-Women's operations and support the implementation of the organization's Strategic Plan 2022–2025.

14. Delegations welcomed the eleventh consecutive unqualified audit opinion and UN-Women's efforts to implement the recommendations of the Board of Auditors. A joint statement delivered on behalf of a group of countries thanked the Board of Auditors for their insightful recommendations that had provided valuable guidance for UN-Women in further strengthening its structures and systems, and for informing Executive Board decisions, overall governance and providing assurance for the community of stakeholders. The cross-regional statement stressed the importance of timely follow-ups for control activities for implementing partners with regards to financial risk and encouraged the Entity to capitalize on the rollout of Quantum to explore and utilize the full potential the system has to offer in line with a series of

recommendations from the Board of Auditors. The importance of strengthening the Entity's information security was underscored in relation to the increased global cybercrime and disinformation threat, and the need to ensure that women human rights defenders can pursue their important work safely. The joint statement highlighted the need for strong internal control systems to ensure the accomplishment of goals and objectives, address and minimize risks, promote operational efficiency, ensure accuracy of records and reinforce adherence to policies, rules, regulations and laws. It expressed appreciation for UN-Women's understanding of how effective internal control and implementation of audit recommendations impact on UN-Women's ability to deliver efficiently on the strategic plan. The joint statement further emphasized that strengthened financial management is a priority and expressed the expectation to see an effective reduction in UN-Women's unallocated core resources. Another delegation noted that the Office of Internal Oversight Services identified losses of \$160,000 during the reporting period and called on UN-Women to do more to combat fraud. One speaker further highlighted how the implementation of recommendations helps to improve UN-Women and strengthen controls and transparency within the Entity and encouraged UN-Women to continue to strengthen its auditing entities to conduct controls. Another Member State thanked UN-Women for its response to the recommendation by the Board of Auditors and encouraged UN-Women to continue to focus its efforts on closing all recommendations as soon as possible. The same delegation commended UN-Women for steadily maturing in its practice of enterprise risk management and for improving its framework for policy oversight.

15. In response, the Deputy Executive Director assured delegations that UN-Women is taking the recommendations regarding partner audits extremely seriously and has improved the corporate monitoring of partner audit financial findings by designating a corporate business process owner for the partner audit portfolio. She further highlighted that the financial findings from 2012 to 2017 were fully closed in 2022 through a one-time inclusive assessment exercise and noted that 59 per cent of the outstanding 2018–2020 financial findings had also been resolved. She added that UN-Women aims to close all remaining outstanding financial findings in 2023. The Deputy Executive Director also mentioned that UN-Women aims to utilize the rollout of Quantum to significantly improve UN-Women's ability to address the issues raised by delegations and the Board of Auditors. The Director of Strategy, Planning, Resources and Effectiveness Division underscored the importance of addressing the risk of fraud and highlighted how UN-Women has continued to prioritize strengthening risk management and internal controls across the Entity.

V. Policy and programme matters

16. In her introductory remarks to the operational briefing on UN-Women activities in the Asia and the Pacific region, the Deputy Executive Director provided an overview of the regional context and shared that while there have been tremendous gains, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals has been slow and, in some instances, even reversing. For example, she noted that women's economic opportunities appeared to be shrinking compared to those of men and stated that women's labour-force participation rates had been low overall and declining. She added that violence against women and girls remained a significant concern, with prevalence rates within the region ranging from 15 per cent to as high as 64 per cent. She underlined that the region is prone to climate-related disasters and noted that environmental degradation and climate change impacts have exacerbated tensions and conflicts. She further added that authoritarian regimes, rising inequalities and identity-based tensions drive political upheaval, terrorism and active conflict and argued that women and girls remain highly vulnerable in such contexts. In her

presentation, UN-Women's Regional Director, ad interim, for Asia and the Pacific detailed UN-Women's presence in the region and highlighted the significant growth in revenue over the last five years. In line with the corporate commitment of 'pivoting to the field,' she further clarified that more human resources have been going to the field offices and fewer to the regional office. The Regional Director, ad interim, shared results and progress from key multi-country and regional programmes, such as those focused on ending violence against women and climate change. She highlighted key results from UN-Women's programming experience in working with the private sector on women's economic empowerment. She added that UN-Women will focus on five priority areas in the coming three years, namely (1) the care economy; (2) the linkages between economic empowerment and violence prevention; (3) climate adaptation and mitigation; (4) humanitarian and disaster response; and (5) new dimensions of women, peace and security (WPS). The Regional Director, ad interim, also emphasized that women's leadership and social norm change will continue to be cross-cutting concerns for the next three years.

17. After opening the floor, one Member State expressed appreciation for its collaboration with the regional office on programmes to address gender-based violence, tackling gender inequalities in procurement systems and value chains, and improving the availability of good gender data, among other things. The delegation encouraged the regional office to continue to strengthen coordination in the United Nations and to support the integration of gender across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus while working in partnership with operational actors in the region and assisting the humanitarian system to hold itself accountable to gender equality commitments and standards. Another Member State commended UN-Women's response in the region from 2018 to 2022 and specifically welcomed the progress on women, peace and security, including the development of national action plans on WPS in 14 countries in the region. Considering the membership of UN-Women to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), it stressed the need for further enhancement of gender commitments in the humanitarian response, and that the priorities and needs of women and girls will be thoroughly ensured across the humanitarian system. A third delegation expressed appreciation for the specific results achieved on economic empowerment and welcomed the regional office's strategic note for 2023–2025. It further suggested that WPS, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction and the women's economic empowerment impact areas could benefit from receiving a higher percentage of the budget. Another Member State thanked UN-Women for the strategic advocacy work being done to create awareness around the direct impact and long-term consequences for women and girls in Afghanistan due to the Taliban's harmful restrictions and decrees and urged the Entity to continue to push for a reversal of the ban on women's rights to work and girls' right to education. Another speaker asked several questions about financing for gender equality, economic participation of women and violence against women. A final speaker commended UN-Women for its work in the Asia-Pacific region and the outcomes achieved. It encouraged UN-Women and its regional office to step up its efforts and support developing countries in the region to overcome the effects of the multiple crises and advance women's development to make further progress—particularly in women's economic empowerment and hunger and poverty reduction/elimination, health, education and employment, among other sectors.

18. In response, the Deputy Executive Director thanked delegations for their support of UN-Women's work in the region and discussed UN-Women's IASC membership and the Entity's work in Afghanistan. Complementing the Deputy Executive Director, the Regional Director, ad interim, provided further detail on the actions taken as follow-ups to the mission of the Executive Director and Deputy Secretary-General to Afghanistan. She provided examples of how UN-Women is working on financing for gender equality in the region and underscored the importance of impact investment.

Regarding violence against women data, the Regional Director, ad interim, stressed that because of underreporting to the authorities the data does not provide a full picture.

19. Next, the Deputy Executive Director presented an update on UN-Women's engagement with International Financial Institutions (IFIs). She clarified that UN-Women's partnership with IFIs aims to influence strategies and financing decisions to support the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, as in line with systematic outcome number 2 on financing for gender equality of UN-Women's current strategic plan. The Deputy Executive Director outlined five key areas of UN-Women's collaboration with IFIs, namely regarding (1) joint analytical work and research to inform IFI approaches and strategies on financing gender equality; (2) joint data collection and data curation to improve gender equality statistics in areas of common interest; (3) technical cooperation; (4) capacity development and training; (5) and joint convening. The Deputy Executive Director presented several specific examples of UN-Women's collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and with different Ministers of Finance. In terms of future collaboration, she stated that UN-Women will continue to use its unique position to develop standards and guidance on financing for gender equality with IFIs, as well as continuing to offer thought leadership and programmatic support and solutions from a human rights, economic and social justice perspective and act as a trusted convenor of global, regional and local development partners, including civil society and grass-roots organizations and IFIs. Regarding standard setting, the Deputy Executive Director shared that UN-Women has worked with the IFC to develop the world's first ever guidelines for gender bonds. Additionally, she mentioned that UN-Women has been actively involved to ensure that UN-Women's expertise on gender in fragile and conflict-affected settings is brought to the fore in all revisions of joint strategies of the Peacebuilding Support Office and the World Bank. A representative from the IDB Group then shared several examples of how it has collaborated with UN-Women in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment across Latin America and the Caribbean.

20. A joint statement delivered on behalf of 26 countries commended UN-Women for deepening collaboration with the IFIs and the work undertaken to date to bolster these partnerships at all levels, including through dedicated resource and capacity-building. The group encouraged UN-Women to continue diversifying its funding base to build financial resilience, particularly as pressures on Official Development Assistance budgets continue to grow. It asked several follow-up questions on UN-Women's collaboration with IFIs, and wondered how Member States could best support the Entity in their work with IFIs to adopt gender transformative results across the spectrum of their efforts for innovative financing for development. Another delegation urged UN-Women to strictly comply with its mandate and refrain from arbitrarily interpreting it. A third speaker commended UN-Women for its progressive and productive engagement with IFIs and asked about the IFI-related revenue projection for 2023. Another Member State expressed its satisfaction with the initiatives launched by UN-Women and its partners on the ground. A fourth speaker asked how programmes are being implemented to ensure post-pandemic recovery and for women in small enterprises. The last delegation welcomed the cooperation between UN-Women and ADB, including regarding statistical data collection and analysis, and asked whether there has been any implementation towards the economic empowerment of women on the African continent. The Deputy Executive Director then answered several questions from delegations, including about the challenges of working with IFIs, the gender bond initiative and the revenue projection. The IDB representative responded to a question on the responses post-pandemic and the

Director of the Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division replied to a question about gender data and statistics.

21. Next, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director presented an update on UN-Women's work to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEA/SH). She provided examples of how UN-Women has continued to strengthen the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse within UN-Women and across the United Nations system, including through establishing a dedicated protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment specialist position at Headquarters level. She further explained that UN-Women became a full member of the IASC in October 2022, allowing the Entity to systematically apply its gender expertise to the provision of protection to affected populations from SEA within all humanitarian responses. She described UN-Women devising a comprehensive indicators and metrics framework to measure progress in tackling SEA/SH and specified that this framework is constituted by three dimensions and contains a total of nine key performance indicators that encompass all facets of work to prevent and respond to SEA/SH. The head of UN-Women further clarified that the Entity's programmatic work on ending sexual harassment in the world is also translated in the work to promote system-wide approaches in ending sexual harassment in the United Nations system.

22. After opening the floor, a group of 42 Member States thanked UN-Women for composing its new SEA/SH monitoring framework that sets out metrics for measuring progress on SEA. The joint statement posed several questions, including those regarding data collection, inter-agency collaboration, effective feedback loops and implementing partners. Another delegation expressed appreciation for the framework's emphasis on metrics related to leadership and accountability and requested further clarification about indicators measuring risks with implementing partners. A third speaker thanked UN-Women for its leadership and commitment to tackle all forms of SEA/SH within UN-Women and in coordination within the United Nations system. It also welcomed the comprehensive indicators and metrics framework to monitor efforts to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and said it looked forward to the operationalization of this framework. It encouraged the Entity to finalize it with regards to baselines, milestones and targets. Another Member State stressed the importance of sharing data and experiences and combining efforts on SEA/SH across the United Nations system. It expressed support for a more systemic UN-wide approach and an improved common understanding of a victim/survivor-centred approach and more consistent due diligence and risk management reforms.

23. The Executive Director responded to questions from Member States and emphasized that accountability and culture change are key dimensions for successful SEA/SH efforts. Additional responses were provided by both Deputy Executive Directors and the Director of Human Resources.

VI. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS Programme Coordinating Board meeting

24. In her opening remarks, the Deputy Executive Director presented key updates on the implementation of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Programme Coordinating Board recommendations. She mentioned that while there is a great deal to celebrate in the fight against the HIV epidemic, progress is uneven and far too many women and girls are left behind. She noted that persistent gender inequalities that drive HIV have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the global pushback against gender equality and women's rights. Sharing statistics and data, she highlighted that the world is critically behind in meeting the

global 2025 target of the General Assembly's Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS for reducing new infections among adolescent girls and young women.

25. As a co-sponsor of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UN-Women works to transform unequal power dynamics and structures and aims to influence the governance of the HIV response. UN-Women's collaboration with UNAIDS was described in different countries aimed at helping tackle HIV/AIDS. After mentioning that the joint programme faced a funding shortfall in 2022, she detailed that UN-Women contributed to task team deliberations on potential sources of funding, re-programmed its work across 17 countries and called for the prioritization of, and increased funding for, initiatives that address social and structural issues which drive HIV infections. The Deputy Executive Director further commended the decision points of the December UNAIDS Board, calling for the joint programme to support countries in their effort to ensure that young people have access to comprehensive sexuality education. In conclusion, she acknowledged the pressing challenges confronting the HIV response and how the current response is insufficient in the face of persistent gender inequalities, increased global pushback against women's rights and the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic and stressed the need to increase advocacy and accelerate actions to promote women and girls' rights across all areas of the HIV response. She added that financing and budgeting must support gender equality and women's empowerment as a critical prerequisite for ending AIDS as a public health threat and scale up proven interventions, including those that address unequal gender norms, reduce gender-related barriers to accessing HIV services and ensure that all women and girls benefit and achieve good health and well-being. Finally, she argued that intensified investment in women's leadership, particularly that for young women, and support for their organizations is important.

26. The Director of the UNAIDS New York Office commended UN-Women for its valuable and impactful contribution to the joint programme and the global AIDS response. He specified that UN-Women has worked to ensure that no women or girls are left behind in the HIV response by strengthening the access of women living with and affected by HIV and those in key populations to HIV information, testing, treatment and care and gender-based violence services. After reiterating that one of the most visible inequalities of the AIDS response is among women and girls, he stressed the need to combine services for sexual and reproductive health together with services for preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence and HIV and that these services must be designed to work for all women and girls in their diversity. After highlighting that UN-Women's engagement with the joint programme and the AIDS response goes beyond medical dimensions, he added that UN-Women supports countries to implement action to end gender-based stigma and discrimination as a co-convenor of the Global Partnership for Action to Eliminate All Forms of HIV-related Stigma and Discrimination along with UNAIDS and other partners. He noted that another dimension of UN-Women's engagement is investing in adolescent girls and young women's leadership and voice in the HIV response programme funded by the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. He concluded his remarks by stressing the need to reduce inequalities for women and girls in order to reduce their HIV risks and mobilize urgent and sustained action to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. He reiterated that UN-Women is an important member of the joint programme and that the Entity has been instrumental in securing and sustaining gains made in the global AIDS response.

27. After opening the floor, delegations thanked UN-Women for the briefing on the follow-up to the UNAIDS Board recommendations. One delegation asked questions about the preliminary results of mainstreaming HIV across outcomes in the new UN-Women strategic plan, the effects of the funding shortfall in 2022 and how to prioritize the most vulnerable and left behind. The same delegation expressed the

expectation for UN-Women to continue to lead the other co-sponsors on mainstreaming a gender equality perspective in UNAIDS programming given the Entity's coordination mandate and thanked the Entity for the commitment and leadership it has shown so far. Another Member State commended the efforts that have resulted in good progress on the 95-95-95 targets among women aged 15 and older, though noted that much work still needs to be done to address stigmatization and discrimination as key drivers of HIV, with compounding effects resulting from gender inequality and gender-based violence, in order to achieve the goal of ending the AIDS pandemic by 2030. The delegation highlighted measures taken at the national level towards ending violence against women and girls, amplifying their voices in the HIV and AIDS response, and eliminating stigma and discrimination that deters women and girls from seeking and accessing life-saving HIV services. It continued to highlight several notable successes, including a 58 per cent decrease in new infections since 2010, the coverage of over 90 per cent of people living with HIV being on treatment, and being the second country certified to have eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HIV since 2016. The delegation expressed appreciation to see the focus on HIV in UN-Women's current strategic plan, and the integration of this work into the broader mandate of the Entity and that of the UN.

28. In her response, the Deputy Executive Director thanked delegations for their comments and underscored that tackling HIV/AIDS was a human rights issue. The Senior Policy Advisor on Gender Equality, Health and HIV/AIDS explained that HIV has been prioritized in the UN-Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 as an impact level indicator and an outcome level indicator on women's bodily autonomy and several output level indicators, as well as through programmatic disaggregation. Responding to the question around funding, the Director of the Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division noted that funding challenges for co-sponsors of the joint programme are particularly concerning for UN-Women, given the disproportionate vulnerability of adolescent girls and young women to HIV transmission and the criticality of gender equality to ending AIDS. She continued to describe how UN-Women mitigated the sudden shortfall and sought to provide concrete inputs into the UNAIDS joint programme resource mobilization strategy to lock arms together with UNAIDS in those efforts, while expanding UN-Women's resource mobilization efforts for specific areas of work.

VIII. Address by the Chair of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS and UN-Women Staff Council and management action

29. In his statement, the Chair of the UN-Women Staff Council conveyed his appreciation and gratitude to Member States and UN-Women leadership for their steadfast support to staff and personnel during these challenging years of the COVID-19 pandemic. He highlighted the flexibility, dedication and commitment that staff and personnel showed during the pandemic and their unwavering devotion to improving the lives of the people they serve. He noted that the newly elected members of the forty-seventh Staff Council are deeply honoured to represent staff and personnel of UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)/UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund)/UNOPS (United Nations Office for Project Services) and UN-Women and shared that they are dedicated to work with management and across the more than 90 staff associations and committees at the country and regional levels to help improve and harmonize the terms and conditions of employment across the board and at all levels. The Chair announced that the Staff Council's 2023-2024 programme of work was approved, which focuses on four strategic objectives, namely: (1) to support and strengthen the important role of local staff associations and committees through creating participatory mechanisms for interaction among

staff representatives globally; (2) to strengthen and harmonize the representation of staff and personnel at all levels, including through monitoring policy developments and advocating for personnel and staff interests through several mechanisms; (3) to enhance the Staff Council's engagement with the United Nations common system to promote and harmonize practices and regulations across the system related to contract modalities, health, well-being, safety and security of personnel globally; and (4) to secure bold progress in making the workplace a better place to work, including through establishing a fully functioning hybrid work modality that increases flexibility and productivity for personnel while also reducing costs for the organizations.

30. Regarding parental leave, the Staff Council welcomed the establishment of the new parental leave framework which provides staff more time to bond with their child and fulfil their parental responsibilities. The Council also underlined its commitment to advance adopted leadership skills training for staff at all levels and support initiatives that improve psychological safety. It announced its intention to partner with the administration in the rollout of staff engagement surveys and ensure meaningful action-based outcomes of these listening activities to promote an inclusive and enabling workplace aligned with the wider diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives across the United Nations system. The Staff Council further expressed support to the different ad hoc informal working groups that are elevating the voices of youth, parents, women and groups of individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other diverse identities, as well as black caucus and others, as it aligns with the aspiration of the United Nations diversity, equity and inclusion agenda. Additionally, the Council committed to strengthening the work on, and holding managers accountable to, the effective enforcement of zero tolerance against harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse of authority to grant a safe, secure and enabling workplace for all personnel. The Council stressed the need to redouble efforts to attract more women from all backgrounds to work for the United Nations and committed to working with senior management to ensure that UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS and UN-Women are encouraging youth to join their workforce and to be inclusive of people with disabilities. In closing, the Staff Council appealed to the Executive Board to stand by UN-Women, including its staff and personnel, to implement collective solutions to collective global challenges.

31. In her response, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director congratulated the newly elected Staff Council and wished the representatives a successful term ahead. The Head of the Entity mentioned that UN-Women yet again faced a deepening range of challenges in 2022, with multiple compounding crises affecting women and girls globally. After highlighting that UN-Women colleagues have risen to these challenges which allowed the Entity to yield crucial results and impact, she noted that UN-Women's workforce is truly its biggest asset and stressed that ensuring their well-being is her utmost priority. In this regard, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director recognized the Staff Council as a key partner for UN-Women in realizing its goal of ensuring the well-being of personnel and in contributing to strengthening the values of the United Nations system as a whole. She commended the new Staff Council on its ambitious programme of work and welcomed the creation of participatory mechanisms among staff representatives, covering all locations, ensuring that voices from all regional and country offices are heard and their experiences are accounted for. With regards to ensuring the work/life balance of personnel, the Head of the Entity highlighted that UN-Women has continued to advance flexible working arrangements to accommodate the needs of all colleagues with various circumstances. She applauded the establishment of a new parental leave framework for the United Nations common system by the International Civil Service Commission and welcomed the Staff Council's focus on enhanced engagement with

the United Nations common system to promote the harmonization of practices and regulations across the system affecting United Nations personnel globally.

32. The Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director underscored that UN-Women is fully committed to working environments that respect the inherent dignity of all persons, affording them the opportunity to reach their fullest potential, and empowering them to deliver the best possible results for those whom we serve. She reiterated that the UN-Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 includes the nurturing of a diverse and empowered workforce and enhancement of an inclusive organizational culture as a core element of its high impact business model. In this regard, she added that UN-Women has been intentional about promoting participatory decision processes that recognize the power dynamics and unconscious bias inherent in United Nations structures and referred to commissioning a global survey in 2022 that included elements specific to the promotion of diversity, inclusion and anti-racism. Additionally, she underlined that UN-Women practices strict zero tolerance towards SEA, SH and abuse of authority and operationalizes this approach inter alia by ensuring accountability for managers via annual certification and by incorporating accountability as tangible measures in our action plans. The Head of the Entity mentioned the importance of ensuring psychological safety as part of promoting a culture of trust and highlighted the Respectful Workplace Facilitators pilot programme that provide an informal, trustworthy and confidential early source of assistance for all personnel. She concluded by reiterating the importance of promoting an ethical organizational culture based on UN-Women’s values of integrity, respectful diversity and professionalism and announced that the recruitment for an independent Ethics Advisor has been finalized.

33. After opening the floor, a joint statement delivered on behalf of 24 Member States thanked the Staff Council for sharing the perspective of non-staff as well as staff, and commended personnel of the agencies for their continuous and valuable efforts to reach those left behind and push for sustainable results towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. After expressing appreciation and support for strong internal systems and a culture of cooperation and learning between the agencies, the group invited all personnel to share their reflections on the availability and accessibility of strong systems to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Concerning the availability of a confidential and accessible whistle-blower system and reliable whistle-blower protection, it similarly welcomed staff and other personnel to share their experiences and describe what obstacles they encounter when reporting cases after experiencing or observing misconduct. After noting that an important aspect to ensure a speak-up culture is legal protection, the group asked the Staff Council to explain how it assesses existing access of staff members to legal advice and representation for cases of discrimination, abuse of authority or sexual harassment in the workplace. In closing, the joint statement encouraged UN-Women and all other agencies to continue their work towards an inclusive, safe and pleasant workplace and culture for all—including efforts to prevent and respond to any instances of discrimination and racism within the organization. Another delegation congratulated the newly elected Staff Council and welcomed the steps taken to improve the culture within UN-Women. The Member State inquired how personnel assess the working environment within the Entity, specifically regarding perceptions of racism, racial discrimination and abuse of authority. It also requested further information about the geographical and racial breakdown of Staff Council representatives and asked how the Council intends to reinforce its cooperation with other staff organizations, specifically in the various country offices.

34. Responding to comments from Member States, the Staff Council agreed with delegations about the importance of having strong internal systems but stressed that this goes hand in hand with a speak-up culture and ensuring the psychological safety

of personnel. The Council also underlined the importance of increased staff engagement and welcomed the establishment of an independent ethics function within UN-Women. Responding to the question on legal assistance, the Staff Council mentioned that there is the Office of Staff Legal Assistance (OSLA) but noted they could have more resources and encouraged strengthening of OSLA. The Staff Council provided a geographical breakdown of its representatives. In response to a question on reporting cases of misconduct, the Deputy Executive Director underscored that UN-Women has both formal and informal reporting channels in place that are safe and accessible to any personnel who have experienced or observed misconduct. She added that the voices of victims and survivors are at the heart of all UN-Women's efforts, noting that reporting mechanisms are fully confidential and respectful. Regarding strengthening the speak-up culture, she mentioned that UN-Women is striving to ensure that it has a working environment in which individuals are treated with dignity and respect so that they themselves feel empowered to promote an inclusive and enabling workplace culture. Regarding the assessment of the working environment by personnel, the Deputy Executive Director shared some outcomes of a recent global staff survey. She further reiterated the importance of addressing racism and discrimination within the organization and highlighted the efforts made in this regard. She concluded by highlighting that the nurturing of a very diverse and empowered workforce is for the first time embedded in UN-Women's strategic plan and that this is monitored through specific indicators. Complementing the Deputy Executive Director, the Director of Human Resources provided further details and shared additional takeaways from the recent global staff survey.

IX. Closing

35. In her closing statement, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director thanked the Executive Board President for his effective and attentive leadership of the first regular session. She thanked the Vice-Presidents for their leadership and effective coordination within their regional groups and recognized the facilitation of the negotiations by the Permanent Mission of Italy and their strategic guidance. She further expressed appreciation for the Executive Board Secretary and his efficient team for organizing a flawless Executive Board session. She thanked all UN-Women colleagues for their contributions and preparations, while noting that the Entity's workforce is its strongest asset and will always remain so.

36. Regarding the Executive Board decision on the Joint Assessment on Oversight and Governance, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director appreciated that the UN-Women Executive Board was the first Governing Body among its peers to adopt such a decision to use the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) as the implementing agency. The Executive Director highlighted that this aligns with her priority for UN-Women to be at the heart of the United Nations system and the extreme focus she places on transparency. She further expressed appreciation for delegations' comments regarding UN-Women's work in Afghanistan and stressed that the Entity will continue to amplify the voices of Afghan women and girls and push for concerted and collective action from the international community, including the OIC. She added that UN-Women will step up wherever it is needed. She highlighted several cross-cutting themes UN-Women will continue to work on across the world, namely: raising the voices of women and enabling their leadership; fostering enduring social norms change, especially as it impacts the acceleration of ending violence against women and girls; and engaging and promoting young people's leadership. She further clarified that an emphasis on country-level results is not about de-capacitating headquarters, but about aligning the capacities of the Entity across the organization in the service of change on the ground where women and girls are.

37. The Head of UN-Women then thanked Germany, Ireland, Italy and Japan who committed to increasing financial resources for the organization. She thanked delegations for their appreciative remarks on UN-Women's eleventh consecutive unqualified audit opinion and underscored that the Entity is proud but not complacent. She explained that UN-Women considers appreciation for the high rate and timely implementation of audit recommendations a challenge to maintain and improve upon.

38. With regard to the prevention of and response to SEA/SH, the Head of the Entity reiterated her commitment to be bold and decisive in confronting incidents when they occur and to take the necessary action to work towards measurable and well-operationalized frameworks to monitor and guide UN-Women's response. She underscored her strong commitment to increasing diversity and tackling discrimination, including race-based discrimination. In closing, the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director highlighted the upcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women and argued that strong Agreed Conclusions will provide an essential basis for closing gaps in access to vital technologies and fostering the innovation of women and girls.

39. In his closing remarks, the Executive Board President conveyed his appreciation for the efficient proceedings and the quality of discussions on each agenda item. He thanked the Bureau, the Vice-Presidents and their experts for their support during and in the lead-up to the session, including for the skilful facilitation of the decisions. He thanked the Executive Board members and observers for their constructive engagement and contributions throughout the session, as well as the Executive Board Secretary and Secretariat team for their support. Referring to the opening remarks of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director in which she highlighted that global events continue to underline the critical need for UN-Women's work in the assertion and protection of women's rights, the President thanked the Head of the Entity and all UN-Women colleagues for their resolve to stay and deliver for women and girls around the world, including in Afghanistan. He recognized the many diverse, high-level and wide-ranging interventions from Member States and thanked them for expressing generous support to the organization. The President concluded by thanking the briefers for their rich presentations and hard work, which helped to ensure the high quality of the Executive Board's deliberations.

40. The session was then adjourned.

Annex I**Decisions adopted at the first regular session 2023****2023/1****Financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2021 and Report of the Board of Auditors**

The Executive Board,

1. *Takes note* of the report of the United Nations Board of Auditors for the year ended 31 December 2021;
2. *Takes note with appreciation* of the eleventh unqualified audit opinion issued by the Board of Auditors on the financial statements of UN-Women for the year ended 31 December 2021;
3. *Takes note* of the management response of UN-Women to the report of the United Nations Board of Auditors for the year ended 31 December 2021;
4. *Encourages* UN-Women to continue implementation of the recommendations of the report in a timely manner, inter alia, in relation to unmapped activities in the annual workplan, unresolved financial findings of partners' audits, and ongoing efforts to strengthen procurement processes;
5. *Acknowledges* the steady progress made by UN-Women in implementing the audit recommendations of the Board of Auditors and support UN-Women's efforts in not having any long outstanding recommendations from the Board of Auditors;
6. *Calls on* UN-Women to state the impacts of implemented recommendations, including on organizational culture, in its reporting on audit recommendations;
7. *Takes note* of the amendments made to the rules, related to the internal audit function, as part of the Financial Rules and Regulations (UNW/2023/CRP.2), and asks UN-Women to assess the need for a comprehensive review and to report back to the Executive Board at the annual session 2023;
8. *Calls on* UN-Women to reduce its unallocated regular resources balance, as appropriate, and requests an update on steps taken in this regard in advance of the annual session 2023.

14 February 2023

2023/2**Third-party joint assessment on the governance and oversight functions of the Executive Boards**

The Executive Board,

1. Decides, after consultation with the relevant Executive Boards of the United Nations development system, as requested by decision 2022/8 paragraph 8, to select the JIU as the implementing Entity of the Third-Party Joint Assessment on Governance and Oversight Functions of the Executive Boards, with the JIU delivering the assessment report by the end of 2023.

14 February 2023