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Special Address: Jan Beagle, Under-Secretary-General for Management, United Nations

Leveraging change to close the gap for women and girls: A UN perspective

I am pleased to moderate this panel on closing the justice Gap for women, and to share with you a perspective from the United Nations about leveraging a time of change to close the gap for women and girls, as a key step towards achieving the SDGs.

We all commend IDLO's work on gender equality and the rights of women and girls – making impact at all levels – globally/politically and at national levels to promote the rule of law – as the President of ECOSOC said, a crucial accelerator for sustainable development.

As the report published yesterday by IDLO makes clear, closing the justice gap for women requires whole of system / whole of government approaches that address inequality and its drivers, and leaving no one behind. We know that the law on the books is still often not the law on the streets.

This issue is personal to me, and rather bitter sweet.

Almost 40 years ago, as a young delegate from New Zealand, I was part of the Working Group of the Third Committee that negotiated the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The Convention was adopted by the GA in 1979 and now ratified by 189 Member States.

The Convention is often described as an international bill of rights for women. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

And, more than two decades ago in Beijing – all of us there heard the loud call “Women's Rights are Human Rights”, and adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—a visionary agenda for the empowerment of women.

And, most recently at the Summit in 2015 when the UN member states agreed the ambitious Agenda 2030 and its SDGs, gender equality and empowerment of women and girls were at the heart.

In the integrated Agenda 2030, it is clear that gender equality and empowerment of women and girls are critical for progress across all 17 goals.

Because we know there is overwhelming evidence that investing in women is the most effective way to lift communities and countries. Because we know women's participation makes peace agreements stronger, societies more resilient and economies more vigorous.

40 years ago, 20 years ago, across the entire 2030 Agenda...the resolve and commitment are clearly evident. The standards and goals are well articulated; we know where we need to be, and we know why.

But while there has certainly been progress over these decades - when we look around us, we still see a profound gap between reality and our aspirations.

There is still a huge disparity between the standards agreed by the international community and the lived realities of so many women and girls, between what women and girls need and want when they seek justice, and the justice they receive.

Serious obstacles remain. The numbers tell the story, eg:

- According to a recent World Bank Group report (Women, Business and the Law 2018), 104 economies still have laws preventing women from working or running a business;
- More than a billion women around the world lack legal protection against domestic sexual violence. Forty-five economies do not have specific laws on domestic violence.
- In 37 economies, a woman cannot apply for a passport.
- The global gender pay gap is 23% to 40% in rural areas, and the unpaid work done by many women goes unrecognized. Only 40% of countries mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value.
- Women's representation in national parliaments stands, on average, at less than one quarter, and in boardrooms it is even lower.
- In the judiciary, women are outnumbered by men in about half the countries of the world, with declining proportions at higher levels in the judicial hierarchy.
- Globally women accounted for 27% of all judges in 2011. Women account for just 25% of all prosecutors.
- Since 1990, women constituted only 2% of mediators, 8% of negotiators, and 5% of witnesses and signatories in major peace processes.
- We know that sexual harassment and abuse are prevalent in workplaces, public spaces and private homes, including in countries that pride themselves on their record of gender equality.
- Where laws to protect women and girls exist, they are often ignored, and women who pursue legal redress are doubted, denigrated and dismissed.

The gap is far from closed. In some cases, we are falling further behind. A World Economic Forum report issued last year noted that it would take 217 years to equalize the pay and employment opportunities of men and women. 217 years is incredible in itself, but what makes this more disturbing is that this number has increased from the 170 years researchers calculated a year earlier.

As the Secretary-General said on International women's Day this year: "Achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls is the unfinished business of our time, and one of the greatest human rights challenges in our world."

Yet, we are at a moment of unprecedented cultural change, bringing with it an opportunity to rapidly accelerate our collective efforts to drive change (to bring reality closer to the aspirations of 40 years ago...).

This is a pivotal time for women's rights.

Historical and structural inequalities that have allowed oppression and discrimination to continue to flourish are being exposed like never before.

The MeToo and TimesUp movements have spread rapidly around the world.

More than ever – women are speaking up, speaking out.

Time Magazine cover at the end of 2017 featured “The Silence breakers” – those who have spoken out on sexual harassment.

Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad for their advocacy on behalf of victims of wartime violence – the silence has truly been broken.

Women around the world are calling zero tolerance for sexual assault, harassment and discrimination of all kinds.

This movement crosses all countries, industries, sectors, organisations and cultures.

It represents a major cultural shift.

The key question now is, how can we use this moment of opportunity, and the momentum generated, to accelerate our efforts to transform structures, institutions and norms that are holding back progress on gender equality, and justice for women and girls, everywhere?

How can we leverage this time of change?

I would like to highlight three key lessons learned from United Nations experience in promoting sustainable change - they are well aligned with the policy recommendations in IDLO's Women and Justice report:

- Leadership and tone from the top is key

To capitalize on this momentum for change, now more than ever, we need strong, determined leadership and commitment to advance women's human rights. For the United Nations, this is true at the normative level, the operational level, and the institutional level.

The Secretary-General has put gender parity and empowerment of women and girls at the centre of his vision, and his agenda for United Nations reform.

It is a priority across the UN system – most obviously, through leadership of UN Women, but also central to the work of every entity and across all pillars of the United Nations – development, peace & security, human rights and humanitarian action.

On taking office, one of the first actions of the Secretary General was to launch the Gender Parity Strategy – seeking parity and greater representation of women across UN headquarters, in peacekeeping missions and in all offices worldwide.

We have now reached gender parity for the first time in the senior management team, and among Resident Coordinators.

The Secretary-General has emphasized his total commitment to zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment in workplace.

He has advanced bold, high-level strategies across the UN system to address both these issues.

We have seen significant progress in less than a year, including the negotiation and approval of model policy across the system, something that usually takes many years to achieve—building on the opportunity of the moment to accelerate and drive change.

We are working to ensure justice for victims – better, faster investigations, effective internal justice systems, and whistleblower protection.

- Accountability

The norms and standards and strategies we need for justice for women are largely already in place (Universal Declaration, CEDAW, Beijing, 2030 Agenda...) – it is the UN's responsibility to support member states to achieve these goals and to use our platform and legitimacy to hold key players accountable.

There is a need for increased focus on addressing the “data deficit” – a key challenge as outlined in IDLO's report on Women Delivering Justice – to enable policies and practices to apply more effectively to closing the justice gap.

A major area of focus for the UN is supporting member states to increase and improve collection and analysis of data – particularly disaggregated data – to be able to better focus responses and strategies to reach the people furthest behind.

This includes harnessing opportunities of new technologies and innovation—and enabling data collection by citizens / communities most affected by ongoing challenges.

For example, across Asia, Africa and South America, women are using crowdsourcing to map the safety of the streets and public spaces in their communities. In Delhi, such data showed that there were more than 7,000 dark spots. The local government is using this data to illuminate these unsafe areas.

- Partnerships

As this Forum clearly emphasizes, we produce most effective results when we work together.

In these times of change and cultural shift, now more than ever we need to build the broadest possible partnerships, including member states, civil society, academia, private sector, and those most directly affected by the issues at hand.

UN can often provide a platform or convening space for such partnerships to happen, as can organizations like IDLO.

We need to keep this issue high on the political agenda – recently in New York we have seen highly committed mobilization of member states, eg: Ambassadorial Groups of Friends to promote Gender Parity and to Eliminate Sexual Harassment.

Partnerships also enable more holistic, integrated responses – which are critical to addressing the multidisciplinary, multi-dimensional issues we are dealing with – the justice gap cannot be dealt with in isolation.

Partnerships are about inclusivity and gaining the widest possible perspectives on issues, to help find collective, effective responses – democratizing Agenda 2030 - and truly leaving no one behind.

Sharing experiences, strategies, lessons learned (both what works and what doesn't) is more critical than ever as we try to keep pace with change – that is why events like this are so important – looking forward to the inputs of our keynote and panel, helping strengthen the collective body of expertise.

We do not have 40 more years to close the justice gap for women and girls.

As the cultural movements are reinforcing, “Time is Up” - We have an important window of opportunity now to leverage the energy of these global movements to drive accelerated action.

To transform this moment of cultural shift into one of lasting change.

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