Remarks at the National Celebration of International Women’s Day

By Ms. Rosa Malango

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Dokolo District Local Government, 8th March 2017
Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Uganda

Your Excellency, the Vice President of the Republic of Uganda

The Right Honourable Speaker

The Right Honourable Prime Minister

The Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development

Honourable Ministers

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Members of Parliament

Colleagues from UN Agencies

Cultural and Religious Leaders

District Leaders

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to participate in the national celebrations of International Women’s Day today in Dokolo. The theme for this year’s International Women’s Day is on “Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030.” In his message for International Women’s Day UN Secretary-General António Guterres in part says, ‘Increasing the proportion of women in public institutions makes them more representative, increases innovation, improves decision-making and benefits whole societies.’

Your Excellency, Uganda under your leadership has women who occupy very important public leadership positions, from the first Woman Speaker of Parliament, the Right Honourable Rebecca Kadaga, to several members of Cabinet, Judges of the High Court, and a third of the Members of Parliament. Allow me to recognize other influence women such as Maggie Kigozi our SDG ambassador for goal five on gender; Elizabbeth Lwanga a
Ugandan who served as UN Resident Coordinator and now serves as civil society. At the Global level, several women leaders have provided inspiration for women notably Her Excellency Sirleaf Johnson, President of the Republic of Liberia, the first woman to become a Head of State in Africa. She has been regarded as an influential and inspirational leader by many. The First Lady of Uganda and Minister of Education has been a strong advocate for Northern Uganda and the fight against HIV/AIDS transmission from mother to child. We must ensure that the new generations can learn from these role models and grow up committed to serving as effective and humane leaders.

The Government of Uganda, with support from the United Nations, has already led the way globally in localizing the 17 SDGs by fully integrating them into the Second National Development Plan (NDPII), which Your Excellency President Yoweri Museveni launched along with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for 2016 - 2020 at Parliament in June 2015. Enforcement of these innovative approaches is being done by the Parliament as part of their efforts to ensure that the implementation of NDPII meets SDGs outlined in government sector plans. I congratulate parliament on hosting the first African parliamentarian’s seminar last week to discuss SDG enforcement.

As part of our contribution to the implementation of NDPII, the UN in Uganda is providing capacity building for enacting and implementing laws on gender equality and supporting the empowerment of women and the girl – child, national wide. Of the 18 UN agencies implementing the UNDAF, 14 work directly on gender parity; UNWOMEN, UNFPA, UNICEF, OHCHR, UNDP, ILO, UNCDF, FAO, WHO, UNAIDS, UNIDO, IOM, WFP and UNHCR. We also have two UN joint programmes on gender currently being implemented focusing on addressing Gender Based Violence and the other on halting Female Genital Mutilation.

With support from the UNICEF and UNFPA Global programme in 2016, a total of 71,915 adolescent girls in 30 districts actively participated in several programs aimed at ending child marriage. A total of 19,266 girls of which 17,793 out-of-school; were enrolled into Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) clubs where they acquired skills in financial literacy and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) information and mentoring.
642 girls were referred for SRH/HIV services and 269 accessed family planning and HIV services. UNFPA and WHO training has strengthened the capacity of 189 health workers on clinical management of rape; while UN Women and the Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA) handled a total number of 50 clients at their legal clinic (2016).

On Monday, Your Excellency, you were a key note speaker at the 6th Kigali International Conference Declaration where Heads of Police Forces from across the African continent gathered in Uganda to review how they can strengthen their role in preventing violence against women and girls. The UN family has supported this initiative in light of the important role we believe security forces and men in general can play to encourage the protection of the rights and dignity of our women and girls. This is SDG 16. I want to thank the Inspector General of Police for agreeing to work with us on this.

Allow me to applaud the exemplary leadership of Uganda, your Government has created a policy and legal environment that promotes women’s participation and empowerment in the changing world of work. Uganda’s Constitution upholds the principle of equality and protection of the rights of men and women with regards to employment opportunities, rights to safety and health and freedom from discrimination. Laws due of recognition include: the Employment Act (2006); the Occupation Safety and Health Act, Labour Union Act, 2006, Workers’ Compensation Act and the attendant Regulations, and Sexual Harassment Regulations (2012). It is my hope that bills such as the Marriage and Divorce bill, the Minimum wage bill and Transitional Justice bill will be adopted soon. They can help and protect women.

Mr President and distinguished guests,

Despite the conducive policy and legal environment, there are still serious hurdles that disadvantage women including cultural norms. Too many women and girls are still unable to access land, credit, education and training, extension services, and market opportunities. Women are still not paid equally for the same work as men and are more likely to work in vulnerable conditions. The Africa Human Development Report produced by UNDP, which I
launched in Kampala last year, describes a gender gap in economic activities that translates into an average loss in sub-Saharan Africa of about $95 billion annually since 2010. In Uganda, the cost of the gender gap in the agriculture sector alone is estimated at US$67 million per year, which could construct about 134kms of tarmac road or 8 general hospitals at an estimated cost of approximately US$8 million each. Imagine what this could mean for the development of cultural tourism, the creation of factories and health centers and schools. We need cultural leaders to join us as champions.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen

We stand at an important opportunity to transform Uganda not just economically but also socially as outlined in vision 2040. This will require a new assessment of our partnerships, our capabilities and our shared aspirations. Constructing a better world of work for women will require us to start change at home and in the earliest days of school of our girls. As girls become women, we must provide them with a safe environment to decide on their development. Girls can become professionals and leaders in public service, science, technology, engineering, agribusiness etc. Ugandan women and girls can also be part of the digital revolution in the country, using innovation to address national problems and benefiting from the higher-paying jobs in this sector. Currently, just 25 percent of the digital industries’ workforce are women. We need more investment on health and education going forward.

All efforts to encourage gender equity in the workplace must be sustainable. This means we should continue to support affirmative actions by your government to promote women’s participation in economic life and help women and girls overcome discriminatory practices such as early marriage, domestic violence, restricted access to land and civil liberties. These practices reinforce the marginalization of women and girls.

Your Excellency, for the past three days I have been travelling through the West Nile region (Arua, Yumbe, Moyo, Adjumani, Lira) meeting with Ugandans in host communities, refugees, authorities and security personnel. An incredible effort is currently underway to
address the lifesaving needs of those seeking protection in Uganda as refugees and to address the poverty conditions of communities hosting refugees. I met women and girls eager to complete their education, scale up their businesses, learn how to read and write. I met youth eager to learn new skills and work to help Uganda achieve its development objectives and improve the quality of life of their families. I listened to experts explain the urgent need to find innovative solutions to increase access to water, to improve the number of experienced health workers and teachers available and build bridges over the Nile. I drove through new villages where Ugandans and refugees co-exist with a shared ambition of providing a better life for their children. I also met women and girls, victims of gender based violence, who are recovering from the trauma, looking for new ways to generate income and anxious to be safe. Allow me to recognize the incredible work being done by hundreds of Ugandans and partners to delivery humanitarian assistance and to identify opportunities for livelihoods in these areas. We have an opportunity to innovate as we create jobs, support small scale entrepreneurs and empower the youth to become contributors to Uganda's development. We will work with security forces to train their personnel and increase their numbers particularly of women police officers to help keep relief workers and beneficiaries safe. We will work with the district authorities to find innovative solutions to protect natural resources and meet urgent humanitarian and development targets. We will work with cultural leaders to create spaces for peacebuilding and development. We will support your development of self-reliant communities and the protection of forests and wetlands.

As I conclude I would like to invite each one of us to identify one action that we will take to improve the lives of women and girls during the next 12 months. These are a few examples:

- Promote women’s rights, they are human rights;
- Help a girl and a woman to either stay in or return to school, or benefit from vocational training;
- Donate your time or equipment to help women and girls access ICT;
- Mentor a girl; teach her to protect the environment
• Ensure your work place has concrete goals on women empowerment;
• Be an advocate to end violence against women and girls at home, work, school, etc
• Encourage parents not to marry their girls off.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Finally, on behalf of the United Nations System in Uganda I would like to reiterate our commitment to promote gender parity and inclusiveness in Uganda. I close by conveying the words of UN Secretary-General António Guterres International Women’s Day message which states: ‘let us all pledge to do everything we can to overcome entrenched prejudice, support engagement and activism, and promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.’

I am confident that together we can make sure that no one is left behind not even women and girl as Uganda pursues its development.

Thank you all for your attention and congratulation to all women and girls in Uganda.