Progress and Equality for All
Foreword by UN Women Executive Director

THIS HAS BEEN A YEAR OF REFORM AND RENEWAL.
WHILE SOME DIVIDES IN OPINION HAVE SHARPENED, THE HUNGER FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT HAS NEVER BEEN GREATER, with vigorous public debate, social mobilization and awareness-raising to transform social norms and strengthen accountability for the implementation of commitments. Persisting high levels of violence against women, economic exclusion and other systemic inequalities are of deep concern, galvanizing old and new partnerships in the drive for lasting solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It has also been a year of profound change for the UN system. UN Women has been fully engaged in the ongoing reforms, to ensure that they strengthen system coherence in supporting gender equality and women’s empowerment, and providing guidelines for working environments with inclusivity, diversity and equality. In tandem, we have been making the adjustments we need within UN Women to be well prepared for changes in the UN Development System, and to meet the challenges of a mobilizing world that is not yet sufficiently on track to meet the goals of 2030. This includes diversifying partnerships for change, focusing on interventions that we can scale up and replicate within and across countries, with results that we can measure quantitatively and qualitatively.

For example, around the world, over 2.5 billion women and girls suffer the consequences of discriminatory laws and gaps in legal protections. Our new strategy on Equality in the Law seeks to fast-track the repeal of discriminatory laws in 100 countries by 2023.

Our report underlines why it has never been more important to get results for those who suffer multiple forms of discrimination, including LGBTI people,
women and girls with disabilities, young girls in poor communities, women and girls in indigenous communities, and refugees and migrants. It shows how women like the historically marginalized Nofotane in Samoa, previously often exploited as domestic servants, can improve their access to sustainable employment and fair income at the same time as employers learn their legal responsibilities. Similarly, we tell the story of how in Cape Verde, 13,000 women domestic workers linked up in association and worked with the Government to develop standards related to their work hours, salaries and vacation time. The report describes how our work has helped women to gain historic victories in local elections in Tunisia and participate safely in general elections in Zimbabwe. It tells how the Republic of Serbia was encouraged to draw on the voices of those frequently left out of discussions on national reporting, like rural women, older women, women with disabilities and Roma women. And how our Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection programme in 2018 was able to assist nearly 29,000 South Sudanese refugees as well as the members of communities that host them, with similar programmes in 32 more countries, providing services to 235,000 crisis-affected women and girls.

Knowing where gaps exist is key to their speedy resolution. For example, we are working with partners in Ethiopia, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania to measure and monitor SDG indicators on women’s land rights and tenure security, with the potential to use that knowledge to secure and protect the land rights of over 108 million women and girls in these countries. Through our joint work with partners on accelerating progress towards the economic empowerment of rural women, 315,000 women, men and children in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda have improved food security and nutrition, as well as income security.

As the 63rd Commission on the Status of Women concluded in 2019, better gender analysis is needed also to inform the development of and investment in social protection, public services and infrastructure. For example, our cost-benefit analysis in Republic of North Macedonia is helping to support choices about scaling up government investment in early childhood education and care as a strategic use of resources that fuels stronger economies and the achievement of multiple Sustainable Development Goals.

Flagship publications like our 2018 global monitoring report on the implementation of the SDGs, *Turning promises into action: gender equality in the 2030 Agenda*, are integral to the analysis and policy guidance we provide. Through such reports, we are able to take stock of ongoing trends and challenges, highlight continuing critical inequalities and lead policy-driven action. *Progress of the World’s Women 2019-2020: Families in a changing world* similarly challenges the boundaries of our world view and shifts us out of preconceptions into informed response.

As you read this report, I invite you to celebrate the rich progress evident in a multitude of countries, as communities large and small tackle violence, poverty, discrimination and exclusion with creativity and determination. The massive challenges of the 2030 Agenda – and the forces opposing gender equality – demand accelerated and scaled up SDG implementation and partnerships, to bring progress and lived equality to even the most marginalized.

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