Accelerating Women’s Economic Empowerment to Achieve the 2030 Agenda

Thank you for inviting Norway to address you all here today on this important topic. I am pleased that we can partner with Costa Rica and the United Kingdom on discussing how to raise women’s access to economic opportunities and in making their voices heard. Redressing gender disparities is smart economics and increases productivity.

Allow me to quickly mention some examples from my own country. Women in Norway are participating on an almost equal footing with men in the labour market. One reason is that Norway has a generous parental benefit scheme. Parents can stay at home with small children for a year with full pay, divided between the mother and importantly the father. We also have day care centres for all young children at subsidised prices. This system makes it possible for both women and men to combine work and family life. Shared family responsibilities strengthen women’s position in the labour market.

These might seem like costly reforms, but in our experience, it is in fact the very opposite. Women’s participation in the labour market has contributed more to Norway’s wealth than the oil from the North Sea.

The foundation for women’s economic empowerment is education. That is why the Norwegian Government has made global education – with particular focus on girls’ education – a main priority in development cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Innovation is crucial for helping people out of poverty and humanitarian crises. Therefore, Innovation Norway, with support from the Government, has entered into a partnership with UN Women on how technology and innovation can be used to reduce poverty and increase security during humanitarian crises. The partnership is looking into the use of blockchain technology to ensure that women are included in cash programming in humanitarian responses. It is also supporting the development of digital solutions that help poor women in rural areas to take part in the global economy.

Role models are important, and can inspire both girls and boys. I am proud that Janne Vangen Solheim – CEO of the Norwegian garment manufacturing company Janusfabrikk – has been appointed UNIDO Goodwill Ambassador for Manufacturing. Based on her extensive experience as a successful private sector actor, Ms Solheim is championing women’s entrepreneurship. We need role models, and we need champions in this field - both women and men.

No country can afford to engage only half of its human capital. Any country failing to empower women economically will inevitably abate its economic performance. Hence, we need to pursue a range of measures to facilitate for women’s participation. As our experience in Norway shows: it pays off, indeed.

Thank you.