

UNITED NATIONS



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THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

**REMARKS AT “WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN DISASTER RISK
REDUCTION”**

Cancun, 25 May 2017

[salutations]

I am honoured to be with you today to discuss “Women Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction”.

As a woman from Africa having spent a career in development in the public and private sectors and civil society, this theme strongly resonates.

It is one of the most critical challenges that needs to be addressed at all levels in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and build a safer, more equitable world for all.

The SDGs will shape the international development agenda over the next 15 years.

The aim is clear: to transform the course of the 21st century by addressing key challenges such as poverty, inequality and violence against women, as well as protecting the environment, promoting full and decent employment, peace and social justice.

Women's leadership and empowerment are critical to all the Goals.

That is why there is a stand-alone Goal – Goal 5 -- on gender equality and women's empowerment and a specific target on women's participation and leadership at all levels of decision making.

Women have a right to equality in all areas.

It must be embedded across institutional processes and legal systems, and upheld in both law and practices.

In other words, all the other 16 Goals must reinforce the outcomes of Goal 5.

We must cut the roots of gender discrimination wherever they appear to provide equal opportunities for all women and girls to access information, job opportunities and funding and to participate in and influence decision-making at all levels.

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is particularly critical for disaster risk reduction.

Due to prevailing socio-economic conditions, cultural beliefs and traditional practices, women and girls are more likely to be disproportionately affected by disasters

These impacts include increased loss of livelihoods, rape, human rights violations, unequal access to life ensuring and relief resources and even increased levels of mortality during, and in the aftermath of, disasters.

When the Tsunami hit the Indian Ocean, in some villages four times as many women died.

The Sendai Framework supports an all-inclusive approach to disaster risk reduction that recognizes women's indispensable role and emphasizes distinct gender-specific capacities and vulnerabilities.

Consistent advocacy over recent years has resulted in significant progress in recognizing the role of women and girls in disaster risk reduction and in recognizing the need for gender equality and parity.

It is also important to note the constructive and productive role women play in disaster risk reduction, especially at the community level.

But more effort is required, in particular in providing adequate capacity building and education to empower women and girls and to promote their representation in disaster risk management and related decision-making processes.

The challenge is now to identify practical ways to fully incorporate the knowledge and experiences of women in risk reduction planning and decision making in country plans, with support from the multilateral system.

2020 is just around the corner and I would like to take this opportunity to urge all governments and local authorities present today to take immediate action to ensure the engagement of women and girls in decision-making, planning and budgeting, and in the design and implementation of gender-responsive national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction.

This is what we all committed to do by adopting the Sendai Framework two years ago.

And this is what is needed to successfully reduce disaster risk and to build long-term community resilience.

There are still glaring gaps in data and knowledge about the specific needs and challenges that women and girls face.

In this regard, I welcome the work of the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Indicators and Terminology relating to disaster risk reduction that made concrete recommendations to initiate or strengthen the collection of data on disaster loss, disaggregated by income, gender, age and disability.

This is a major step forward.

More action is however required to ensure systematic data collection and reporting, so the needs, capacity and contributions of women and girls finally become visible.

In closing, I would like to extend my appreciation to UNISDR, UN Women and IFRC and all grass-root women groups, community leaders and local and national governments involved in addressing the gender dimension of disaster risk reduction.

I would also like to commend the gender balance on this panel today.

Women's leadership and empowerment in disaster risk reduction is not just about women and girls.

It requires an inclusive and people-centred approach that engages women and men and girls and boys and motivates them to become champions of gender equality.

I thank you for your attention and the opportunity to contribute to this important session.

I wish you a fruitful meeting and look forward to building on your recommendations to deliver together our common goal of gender equality, women leadership and empowerment by 2030.

Thank you.

[END]