Breakfast Meeting of the Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for the Environment

Remarks by Acting Director-General of UNON, Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif

Wednesday, 13 March 2019, 07:35

Excellencies, Honourable Ministers, Heads of delegations
Distinguished participants from civil society and academia,
UN Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Welcome to the United Nations Office at Nairobi!

A very good morning to you all!

I join you today wearing two hats: as Acting Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, otherwise known as UNON, and Executive Director of UN-Habitat. As you know, we women are good at multitasking!

It is an honour to be among you this morning, and particularly to participate in this meeting of the Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for the Environment.

It is fitting that this Network is, once again, meeting on the margins of the UN Environment Assembly, given the major contributions that women make to the maintenance of the earth's ecosystems and natural resources.

It is also fitting that this meeting is taking place right here at UNON, which is a crucial hub for the UN's work in the region and around the world. Some 3,500 staff members from over 60 different UN offices and entities based at UNON are working hard every day to advance the Sustainable Development Goals.

The UN family in Nairobi is well placed to tackle the inter-related issues of gender equality and the environment, and, might I add, the work that UN-Habitat is responsible for, which is Sustainable Urban Development and is charged with coordinating Sustainable Development Goal 11 – 'make cities safe, resilient, inclusive and sustainable'.

I have no doubt that this meeting will drive forward our collective efforts to promote gender responsive sustainable environmental management at regional and global levels.

Today, I would like to share with you three key messages:

First, gender inequality remains one of the major obstacles to sustainable development. It seriously hinders efforts to address a wide range of development challenges, including the environment-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. We all know that environmental challenges – including climate change and unsustainable natural resource management – affect women disproportionally. For this reason, women need to be at the forefront of environmental issues which affect them most. Although there has been some progress in this regard, women are still frequently excluded from processes and decision making relating to the use of and management of natural resources. I have recently been engaging with the network 'Women 4 Climate' and believe that partnerships such as this are vital to enhance women's participation and leadership in climate action.

Secondly, we must recognize that women are not only victims of environmental challenges but can be and are indeed positive catalysts for action. Throughout the world, women have played major roles in community-based environmental movements, which have contributed to positive change. Indigenous women often have extensive knowledge in sustainable resource management, which is often overlooked by so-called 'experts.' It is only by working with

communities and local women that we can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Here in Kenya, Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai was a champion for environmental conservation, human rights and women's empowerment, and a pioneer in articulating the links between human rights, poverty, environmental protection and security.

All of you, working together as part of this Network, provide another excellent example of how women leaders can make a positive impact on efforts to tackle the gender-environment nexus

My third point is that a more scientific and deeper understanding of gender issues would greatly contribute to developing more effective environmental strategies and policies. Reliable data is crucial to gain a comprehensive picture of gender aspects of environmental issues, including the differentiated impacts on women and men. Yet, there is limited availability of such data. Resources such as the Global Gender and Environment Outlook -- which UN Environment developed at the request of this Network -- provides an important baseline for decision makers and practitioners who are working to overcome gender biases in environmental and natural resources management.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all partners that contributed to the organization of this important event, and I encourage the Network to make more and stronger partnerships and commitments. Thank you for inviting me, and I wish you all the best in your substantive sessions and discussions here this morning.

Thank you for your kind attention.