



United Nations

**STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
“2<sup>ND</sup> CONFERENCE ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”**

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*Sarkar Khanoomeh Mowlaverdi,*

*Khanoomha va aghayan,*

*Man kheili khoshhal hastam az inja amadan va az deedar shoma.*

*Een avaleen bar ast kay man bey inja amadam, pass kheili khosh bakhtam.*

*Hala man mikham chand kalameh bah shoma sohbat konam, vali bey englisi.*

## **Ladies and gentlemen,**

I am very happy to be here today.

I have a number of things that I would like to say. But the first is that I would like to join our Iranian hosts – and myself as a humble guest in the Islamic Republic of Iran – to welcome those who have traveled from afar to be with us today.

I have been asked to speak on the issue of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). And I shall do so.

I would like to say, first of all, that these SDGs are things that matter. In two weeks' time we expect that in New York at the United Nations General Assembly, the SDGs will be approved and they will establish a framework for our development work for the next 15 years.

Why are such goals important?

Well, the first reason is that they motivate us to achieve social mobilization. They help to strengthen networks of advocacy and expertise. Finally, they often also create peer pressure among countries to achieve goals.

Between the years 2000 and now – 2015 – the world has worked with what we call the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). And as a result of those goals a number of very important things have happened across the planet – including here in Iran.

For we have done a great deal to lift many, many people out of poverty by focusing on humanity's 8 MDGs.

Here in Iran we have achieved a lot – especially in 5 of the MDGs.

Look at where we stand in Iran terms of long and healthy life. In 1980, the average life expectancy in Iran was 51 years. Now, it is 74.

The per capita income (at purchasing power parity) of the average Iranian in 1980 was about US \$6000. Now it is double that.

Iran currently ranks 76 out of almost 200 countries, in terms of its Human Development Index. And over the period – in the last 30 or so years – it has reduced its development deficit faster than any country except the Republic of Korea.

These are incredible achievements.

Access to knowledge – the number of people at school – has increased dramatically. It almost doubled between 1980 and 2013.

And in areas like child mortality, we now have about 17 per 100,000 deaths which is down from almost 300 per 100,000 in 1967.

So there are significant changes that have taken place.

But, there are challenges that still remain.

And some of those challenges face the women in our communities. In two specific areas.

The first challenge that we face – according to an assessment by the United Nations Development Programme – is in terms of participation of women in leadership, whether that be business leadership or political leadership. This is a major challenge. And this is one of the reasons why it is so impressive to see that in current political configuration, three Vice-Presidents – one of whom is with us today, Vice-President Mowlaverdi – representing women at higher levels. We also recognize the achievements of the other two Vice-Presidents, Madam Ebtekar and Madam Aminzadeh.

In addition to this, there is a challenge that the formal participation of women in the labour market. Here in Iran the figure is currently less than 20 percent – whereas in many countries in Asia and the Pacific the figure is well over 50 percent.

Ladies and gentlemen, these are real constraints on women's empowerment and, as a result of that, these are real constraints on national development.

This is why I believe and events like what we have here today can help to improve Iranian institution support for women's economic empowerment – especially the empowerment of vulnerable women in rural areas.

Now, the United Nations has been present in Iran since 1948, and in that context we have worked with our partners – especially in the more recent years – to provide options to empower women in their communities through

public and private business partnerships – for example – by mainstreaming gender-sensitive budgeting in government processes, and through events and opportunities such as providing social mobilization through micro-credit schemes.

For example, there is one initiative that the UN is working on in 18 provinces in Iran to work to provide micro-credit to women in poor rural areas. As a result of this, women have an income stream – they have cash – and they become much more empowered to make decisions about their lives.

So, these are things that the UN is working with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards, under the current 5<sup>th</sup> Five Year National Development Plan.

But, we are also now at a stage where the world is no longer looking at the MDGs. Those eight goals.

We are now looking at a broader range of 17 goals. Among those goals, the issue of women's empowerment is again very high and very prominent.

Of those 17 goals, one in specific terms focuses on women. It is Goal Number 5. That that goal says: "To achieve gender equality and to empower all women and all girls."

As I said, this goal will be one of the 17 that is approved later this year in NY at the General Assembly of the United Nations.

And I would like to read some of the specific results under that goal – specific results – for you, so that you can – for those of you who have not had a chance to look at the SDGs – see what the nations of the world – the global community – wishes to set as an objective for its future for the next 15 years.

I will read 7 of these planned results.

- "End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere."
- "Eliminate all forms of violence against women."
- "Eliminate all harmful practices such as child marriage, early marriage, and forced marriage."
- "Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work."

As we all know, many women do contribute heavily in domestic and a care settings. And that contribution is usually not recognized financially. They do double jobs and it is never recognized. And so this result has been put here to recognize the contribution of women in that regard.

- “Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.”
- “Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.”
- “Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources.”

So, ladies and gentlemen, these are some of the priorities which the world wishes to establish for the next 15 years – to build upon what we have already done and the achievements that we have made in the past 15 years including in gender equality and gender empowerment for women.

I would like to move to conclude my remarks, by saying that it is my privilege – again – to be in the presence of Vice-President Mowlaverdi who stands out as one of the prominent thinkers and advocates for women’s empowerment in this society – which has seen an increase in women’s empowerment in the past several years.

I would also like to recognize the work of Ms. Jelodarzadeh who has headed the Executive Committee for this event.

But, my final reflection is not so much directed at the entire audience here today, but it is mainly directed at the men and the boys in the audience.

I have worked for the United Nations for almost 30 years and I have travelled to many lands. I have tried to make a contribution. And I have seen some of the worst things that can happen – including to girls and to women.

And in my view, a large part of the solution to inequality and the oppression that some women face around the planet is as a result of **the way men think about women**. And so I have encouraged those who are listening to me today, and maybe those in other countries who hear these words, to think about the way men think about women. And the respect that they need to show increasingly to women’s choices, to giving them a voice, to recognizing to what they can contribute.

And so, as a proud husband and father of three daughters, I conclude my remarks by saying that I believe that we are indeed at the beginning of a new chapter in our effort to restore dignity to all people on this planet through the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, but especially the dignity of that half of the world’s population that it is represented by our mothers, our sisters and our daughters.

I thank you all.