

**Statement by Grete Faremo**  
**UNOPS Executive Director**  
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Thank you, Mr. President, distinguished members of the Executive Board, observer representatives, friends and colleagues.

It is a distinct pleasure to congratulate you **Ambassador Koonjul**, upon your election as president of the Executive Board and to wish you and all the vice presidents, representing **Albania, Antigua and Barbuda, the Republic of Korea and Switzerland**, every success in your important endeavours.

I also would like to thank **Ambassador Petersen** and all his vice presidents for their services during the past year and for their invaluable contributions to our work, especially leading us to our new Strategic Plan. It has been a privilege to work under your guidance.

### **Introduction**

I would also like to welcome all new members to this first meeting of the year.

For me personally, it is the start of my fourth year at UNOPS. I am proud to report to you today, that UNOPS has had another very good year. Our finances are sound. Our services are in demand.

### **New Strategic Plan**

Many of you have heard me say this before. But in these trying times for many parts of the UN system, I would like to remind us that UNOPS does not ask or receive core funding. We live off the quality of our services and partners' satisfaction.

Our business is implementation. We work with Member States, the UN family, and partners across public and private sectors.

Our services extend from implementing projects to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, to supporting the implementation of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and to helping address humanitarian crises and peace and security priorities.

We have now started implementation of UNOPS Strategic Plan 2018-2021. We are eagerly pursuing how our new strategy positions us within the UN system to further enhance and expand our cooperation – including with new partners.

Our new strategy focuses on three corporate goals.

**First** is efficiency.

To enable more efficient support services by continuing to reduce costs and time spent. We will constantly strive to improve our efficiency.

**Second:** effectiveness.

To help partners deliver more effective solutions. By means of innovation, we will strive to deliver safer solutions, greener solutions and more gender-balanced solutions, essential for the SDGs.

**And third:** access new funding. We go beyond Official Development Assistance.

Most of our operations are in vulnerable, fragile areas, often in conflicts. We work in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Somalia and South Sudan. More than 60 per cent of our portfolio is in these and other equally challenging areas.

A recent example is a new initiative helping to restore basic services and critical urban infrastructure across Yemen, with the World Bank.

This \$150 million project aims to revitalize critical transport, energy, water and sanitation services, to provide 1.4 million Yemenis with better access to the services they need.

This is in addition to the ongoing support we provide to the UN Verification and Inspection Mission for Yemen, where in extremely challenging circumstances, we have helped more than 290,000 tonnes of food, fuel and relief supplies to reach Yemeni ports this month.

Other countries have faced natural disasters, and as recently as last week, we helped set up the first-ever science and innovation centre in Antigua and Barbuda. This is a collaboration between the Government, UNOPS and the Ocean Generation. The participants from a variety of countries demonstrated high aptitude and skillsets to fight the recurring challenge of the hurricane season.

Twenty-two teams presented sixteen software and hardware solutions that would help government, rescue workers and communities respond faster, build resilience protocols, and communicate, as may be required, without relying on electricity, internet or cellphone towers.

Moreover, UNOPS together with the Government of Antigua and Barbuda has launched a UNOPS Innovation Centre. The main focus of the Innovation Centre will be for local entrepreneurs to drive innovative approaches in the areas of climate change and clean technology. This is but one example of how UNOPS intends to bring to good use our expertise in innovation and resilient infrastructure in the Small Island Developing States.

## **Reform priorities**

Distinguished members.

One year ago, I said to this board that we at UNOPS are well-positioned to support the Secretary-General's reform agenda, which he had just announced. We continue to be so.

The Secretary-General has called for a more field-focused United Nations. A UN more decentralized, with more people and resources in the field and less administration at headquarters level.

UNOPS has always been field-focused. We continue to improve this model to secure stronger impact on the ground. Our management budget remains unchanged over the last decade, while delivery went up threefold. The management budget now represents less than 4% of our total gross revenue whereas a decade ago it was about 8%.

The Secretary-General is also aiming for a clear separation of policy from operations throughout the whole UN.

In 2017, we revised internal governance, by separating policy and control functions from operations across all aspects of our organization.

Through this approach, responsibility, authority and accountability are fully aligned, and we reduce the potential for any conflicts of interest.

Beyond UNOPS, we offer our services in support of broader UN reform.

We stand ready to support implementing the Secretary-General's reform priorities in peace, sustainable development and internal management.

We welcome the move towards an impartial Resident Coordinator system. It can be particularly challenging for UNOPS, which is a non-resident agency in so many countries, to have a voice and be called upon when the RC is not independent and only promotes resident agencies for implementation of areas where UNOPS has comparative advantage. Often we are left out.

I have reached out to UNDP, and we recently met at the Executive level from both organizations in an effort to improve our joint capacities. Together we have committed in good faith to identify common areas where we can support and complement each other, to increase the impact of our work on the ground.

We recognize challenges where the work of sister agencies overlaps with our own. We have years of experience running shared service models, and offer to share our expertise for the benefit of all. We hope and expect that this approach will be shared by all parts of the UN system, since we are all in this together. It's about mutual recognition.

With our infrastructure mandate, our abilities managing procurement processes across the UN family, and our vast implementation experience, we welcome the opportunity to work together more closely, so that we can provide cohesive and coordinated solutions to meet the needs of Member States.

Distinguished members.

Last year, a board member asked me a simple question: "We hear a lot about your successes, but where are your challenges?"

So today, I will address, in particular, one such challenge: The gender challenge

Before I continue, I want to say the following: Gender is a bigger challenge than many recognize even today.

Gender is a matter of rights.

Gender is about opportunity.

But gender is also about hard economic facts.

People and countries that limit the opportunities of girls and women to pursue an education and to enter working life are really undermining their own growth potential. This applies to the countries we call rich and the countries we call poor alike.

There is a strong correlation between inequalities of working opportunities for women and men, and the performance of these countries expressed in Gross National Income.

So what we do here at the UN is really a reflection of a global challenge, which at the end of the day, if we fail, will impede our chances of realizing the Sustainable Development Goals.

### **Gender targets**

We will soon launch the UNOPS Gender Parity Strategy.

**First**, we have committed to gender parity throughout our entire workforce by 2020.

**Second**, we are poised to meet the UN system-wide gender targets to achieve the equal representation of men and women among staff by 2026 for P4 and above levels.

**Third**, we will increase the representation of women at senior and decision-making levels, by extending the principles of the system-wide approach, to all personnel, not only UN staff.

To reach these targets will require leadership. It will cause changes to the way we manage our people, change to the way we recruit, and change to the way we report to you.

As we reported to the board last year, 37% of our personnel are women.

And when we survey our personnel, the results also show clear differences in engagement and career expectations amongst men and women.

This was not welcome news. But it is a challenge we can and will take.

Last week the Secretary-General informed us that, for the first time, the UN had reached gender parity at senior leadership levels. We are not there yet.

Across the UN, the extent of this challenge differs. It is influenced by many factors, including different mandates and structures.

We are field-based, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings, areas where the under-representation of women remains a stark challenge.

We do construction. Gender data in infrastructure, in the places we work, is sparse in the field of engineering. Globally, the International Labor Organization tells us that the percentage of women in the construction sector has decreased over the last twenty years.

And in emerging countries, women face the largest gender gap in labour participation rates.

We are still committed to improving our performance in this field. And as an example, our operations across the Middle East – and in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Tunisia – are led by women. But these are slim examples amongst a male-dominated workforce.

And beyond the issue of balancing our personnel at all levels, we will aim to develop a gender balancing strategy in the design of our projects. Our partners may or may not have included gender considerations in their project specifications. But we will get to a point where we are able to point out gender relevant effects of different possible project designs and propose new solutions.

Still many project templates have an implicit gender bias. We can help identify such and propose change in the pursuit of gender balance.

To meet our goals is a leadership responsibility.

It is my personal responsibility – as it is the personal responsibility of each member of my senior leadership team. All personnel with leadership responsibility will be measured by how they deal with the gender challenge.

There are positive examples we can learn from across the work we undertake for partners.

For example, in Somalia, with the Government of Japan, we have been helping traders, particularly women, develop new skills to help their businesses thrive.

Or in Kenya, with UNICEF, we build on existing cultural practices. We provide training to challenge gender norms and stereotypes, to positively impact the lives of women and girls in remote communities. This is part of a broader project where we build and improve health centres across Kenya.

Here, we also train local construction teams, some led by women, in sustainable building techniques, with the overall aim to improve maternal healthcare in a country that has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world.

The current global focus on sexual assault and harassment in the workplace only serves to reinforce the importance of this commitment.

There is, of course, no alternative to a zero-tolerance policy in this area. In this respect, I would echo and support the recent announcement by my colleague from World Food Programme on the need for expanded and dogged commitment to address all allegations whenever and however they are raised. If needed, we will change our policies accordingly to clarify the message.

We have set ambitious targets, but above all else, this new strategy is driven by a simple principle: To do what is right, and provide equal opportunities and a safe environment for women in all areas of our work.

## **Conclusion**

Distinguished members.

To conclude, we share a sense of urgency, and are committed to supporting efforts across the UN family, in support of our mutual goals.

And we share a common aim: To do our utmost to ensure implementation of Agenda 2030.

I look forward to hearing both your comments and your questions.

Thank you.