

## STATEMENT OF THE WOMEN'S REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, October 14, 2013

Mr President, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am proud to deliver this statement as the representative of the women of the Netherlands. But I am speaking here not just for them, but for women everywhere. I want to tell you about the challenges they face in terms of gender equality, and suggest ways of confronting those challenges.

860 million women – over a quarter of the world's women – cannot participate in the world economy. Even in countries like my own – the Netherlands – half of the female adult population is not financially independent. These are staggering figures. Staggering because they illustrate a global problem – but also because they signify an immense opportunity. Just think of the enormous potential these women represent – of the contribution they could make to the world's current economic and social challenges.

According to the World Bank, women invest 60% more of their earnings than men in 'social capital' – food, education and health care for their families. 60% more! This benefits whole societies. Not just in the short term, but also in the long run. Future generations benefit greatly from their mothers' activities. Developing the enormous potential of women can create jobs and bring economic prosperity to many countries – as well as boosting innovation, reducing poverty and promoting well-being. Women are the agents of change!

Millennium Development Goal number 3 is very clear: promote gender equality and empower women. One way to become empowered is to run your own business. But women entrepreneurs still face many barriers. Take Thabo from Malawi, who can't start her own farming business because she isn't allowed to own land. Obstacles persist, in both developed and developing countries. In the former, the so-called 'glass ceiling' holds women back on the career ladder. But in many parts of the world women are nowhere near the ceiling. They can't even get their foot on the ladder. They have no access to capital, no access to property, no access to markets.

All these barriers mean that we can't develop the potential of women's entrepreneurship. But even when barriers are removed, opportunities aren't always seized. How can we make the most of this untapped potential? The first step is simply to take businesswomen seriously!

In the Netherlands, for example, women still take on more than their fair share of domestic duties. They find it hard to balance work and private life. Many dream of running their own business, but cannot turn their dreams into reality. In part, women need to learn to stand up more for their ambitions. Peer networks and high-profile role models are a good way of stimulating entrepreneurship and helping companies to grow. Owners of companies can act as mentors, as happens in the successful Dutch programmes Growth Accelerator and Qredits.

Women's entrepreneurship is about strong individuals helping to solve global problems and creating wealth and welfare through innovation and collaboration. It's about great women and great enterprises. Women entrepreneurs are different from **and** yet equal to their male counterparts. Different in their way of doing business. Equal in their qualities.

Encouraging women to start their own business and participate in economic growth is not enough. Microcredits and inclusive finance have definitely shown their value. Starting off 30 years ago in Bangladesh, where the Grameen Bank helps women like Anwara, who got a micro loan for her cellphone company. But now it's time to step things up. To place women on a more equal footing. To go beyond small credits and small undertakings, and to recognise the full potential of business women. Such recognition is crucial if women are to invest in and expand their businesses and to develop their own strengths..

Entrepreneurship leads to empowerment. Women who have their own income enjoy a stronger position. They gain respect, by contributing to the family's earnings. They have a means of escape from domestic violence – like Alexandra from the Netherlands who started a successful company after being the victim of abuse. Entrepreneurship is not just about starting a new business but also about starting a new life. Empowerment in the form of greater self-confidence, self-esteem and social inclusion.

In my search for solutions, I spoke to entrepreneurs, academics, politicians, NGOs, students. They all recognised the enormous untapped potential of women's entrepreneurship. They called for barriers to be removed, role models to be deployed, and men and women entrepreneurs to work together to tackle global challenges.

When you leave this room, ask yourself if you are alert to the potential of women entrepreneurs in your country. Do what you can to remove the obstacles they face, and encourage them to seek mentors. It's time to take businesswomen seriously. Not just because they could use some help, but because they can help us all. Together we can identify opportunities, combat challenges and create the wealth and welfare the world needs.

Thank you.