

**Welcome Remarks by Mr Michael Møller
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Acting Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva
Opening ceremony of the Geneva NGO Forum - Beijing+20
UNECE Regional Review**

**Palais des Nations, Room XVII
Monday, 3 November 2014 from 15:00 to 16:00**

President Longchamp
Madam General Secretary
Distinguished Speakers
Ladies and Gentlemen:

A very warm welcome to the Palais des Nations and to International Geneva. And apologies for my late arrival, but it was important for me not to miss this opening.

It is a real pleasure to see so many of you here. Let me, first of all, congratulate the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, Geneva, on the organization of this Forum. The broad agenda and the impressive turn-out reflect the commitment and hard work that has gone into the preparations. And congratulations also to our colleagues in the UNECE for making the NGO platform part of their Beijing+20 review.

A special welcome to President Longchamp and a warm thank you for the strong, continued commitment of the Canton of Geneva to the work of the United Nations and all our partners here in International Geneva. The Canton of Geneva has a long-standing tradition of very practical support for the civil society dimension of International Geneva, and your participation here today is very much a reflection of this focus on NGOs. Thank you, Mr. President, for this much-appreciated support.

We rely on the commitment of all of you in taking forward women's empowerment and gender equality - in the ECE region and across the world. Our International Geneva - with its large concentration of stakeholders and tradition for creative thinking - provides a useful platform for these discussions. Women's empowerment and gender equality cut across the three key dimensions of our work - peace, rights and well-being - and unite us all in a common cause. With civil society at the heart of the efforts.

The challenges are clear: the annual Gender Gap Report - which was released last week by the World Economic Forum here in Geneva - highlighted once again persisting gender gaps across and within regions. The gender gap for economic participation and opportunity stands at 60% worldwide. The gap for political empowerment lags even further behind, standing now at 21% despite improvements over the past decade. The sad and unacceptable reality is that a baby girl born today will still have to confront inequality and discrimination, no matter where she lives – in different forms and in different measure.

I welcome your focus on empowerment of women in situations of vulnerability: in conflict, as refugees and displaced persons, as migrants, in contexts of violence and violations of human rights. These are situations where women are often most at risk. And these are situations where we are still grappling with how we can best support them. This also came

through clearly in the open debate in the Security Council last week on women, peace and security, which highlighted – once again – the challenges emanating from a combination of unparalleled levels of displacement and long-running crises. I am sure that your discussions will help take that work forward.

Your agenda brings home the incredible potential of women as agents of change. Our failure to capitalize on this potential is a tremendous opportunity lost for all of us. Research demonstrates clearly that countries with higher levels of gender equality have higher economic growth. The Gender Gap Report, for example, showed the strong correlation between a country's gender gap and its national competitiveness. We simply will not achieve economic progress, and we will not have a world at peace, a world where all people can live in dignity and safety, without empowerment of women.

I appreciate very much that your agenda is forward-looking and action-oriented. We all know the challenges. Most important is what we can do to overcome them - and how we can do it. There are great examples - at local, national and also regional level - of how women have been integrated better in the work place in decent jobs, how structures have been put in place to ensure protection of their rights, how they have been included in political decision-making. We need to take those lessons, scale them up and see how we can apply them across communities and across regions.

Empowerment of women is our common goal and our common mission. And we all need to be engaged - at all levels, in all countries. Gender equality means a better world for us all. Thank you again for being part of that collective effort.