

**U.S. Statement
UN Women Executive Board
Second Regular Session
September 15, 2015**

Mr. President, Madame Executive Director, Distinguished Delegates,

The United States strongly supports UN Women's mandate to help member states promote gender equality, to lead and coordinate the UN system's work on gender, and to promote accountability. We note that in the recent negotiations on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United States, with many of our international partners, successfully advocated for a stand-alone goal on gender equality. We are very pleased, moreover, that gender-equality and empowerment of women is also considered a cross-cutting issue across the 2030 Agenda. We look forward to collaborating with UN Women and other member states in ensuring this important priority is fully supported as we move toward achieving the goals by 2030.

UN Women must have sufficient resources to achieve its mandate. We note that the Report of the Board of Auditors commended UN-Women for deepening its resource base and improving its operational effectiveness. Resource mobilization remains a priority for UN-Women and for the United States. We agree with the report and support its contents and conclusions.

The United States will continue to join forces across the board to achieve all the priorities of UN Women's mandate. We especially commend the efforts of UN Women to end gender-based violence and intend to continue our support for its initiatives. UN Women's attention to the issue of violence against indigenous women and girls and violence against women who are targeted because of their sexual orientation and gender identity is critical. There is still much work to be done, however, in all areas of the UN Women mandate. The United States strongly supports the work of UN Women on political participation, economic empowerment, humanitarian action, women, peace and security, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In this regard, we are pleased that UN Women's leaders have spoken strongly and publicly about the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights. UN Women's written documents use this phrase as well. The United States will now begin using this phrase and will refer also to "sexual rights." Our understanding of the term "sexual rights" draws heavily from paragraph 96 of the Platform for Action adopted at the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference. That

language characterizes the human rights of women to include rights relating to sexuality and stresses equality between men and women in matters of sexual relations and sexuality. As a result, the United States understands the term “sexual rights” to include all individuals’ “right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence.” With further reference to paragraph 96 of the Beijing Platform of Action, we note that “equal relationships between [individuals] in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behavior and its consequences.” Finally, we wish to clarify that the United States will use the term “sexual rights” or “sexual and reproductive health and rights” to express rights that are not legally binding. Sexual rights are not human rights and they are not enshrined in international human rights law; our use of this term does not reflect a view that they are part of customary international law. It is, however, a critical expression of our support for the rights and dignity of all individuals regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

In conclusion, as we work to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda, gender equality and empowerment of women and girls will continue to play an important part. The empowerment of women, across the life-cycle, is a known driver of development that will be crucial to addressing the U.S. government’s priority of resolving the “unfinished business” of the Millennium Development Goals in the areas of health, nutrition, education, environmental sustainability, and poverty. Full and effective support for/coordination on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is essential for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Thank you.