



Joint Statement by the UN on International Women's Day

On International Women's Day, let us pay tribute to all women in Nepal who contribute so much to the well-being of their families, communities and the nation.

This year's theme is "Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities: Progress for All". In every part of the world, women are the weavers of the fabric of society, and progress towards equality is being made. Nepal has also made a significant progress in the past few years. Today, more than 30% of Constituent Assembly members are women. Women across Nepal are contributing to build a new Nepal by participating actively in the constitution-making process to ensure that the constitution not only promotes and protects gender equality but also enables women to achieve equality. Therefore, we acknowledge the progress made so far, but it is important to recognize that there is still a long way to go to achieve true equality.

Almost the same number of girls as boys attend primary school, but as long as thousands of girls are forced to marry as child brides, which keeps them from achieving higher level of education, we have to stand up for equal treatment and opportunity. This includes the right to an education and to make the most of one's potential. Only 42.5% Nepali women are literate, compared to 65.1% men.

As long as women who produce most of the world's food can neither own the land they work on nor have rights of inheritance to it, we need to ensure equal access to resources. Nepali women earn only half of what their male counterparts earn. Women in less than 1% households own all three major assets (house, land and livestock).

As long as women and girls continue to eat less in favour of men and boys, we need to make sure women know that they have "The Right to Food" and to their own well being.

As long as a Nepali woman dies needlessly every four hours from complications of pregnancy and childbirth, we have to prioritize the health and rights of women. This includes the right to sexual and reproductive health.

As long as there is widespread violence against women and girls and impunity for these crimes, we have to enact and enforce equitable laws to tilt the scales of justice to end the culture of impunity. Women, fearing or experiencing violence, are less likely to negotiate safe sex, go for HIV testing, share their HIV status and access treatment.

Many Nepali women and girls are taking their lives to escape from the hardship, violence and discrimination that they face. The highest cause of deaths among women of reproductive age in Nepal is suicide. We have to mobilize for real change to end unequal treatment, discrimination and violence against girls and women.

Efforts continue among civil society groups to ensure that Nepali women enjoy full rights with respect to citizenship, including in relation to conveying citizenship to their children - a key requirement to preventing and reducing statelessness.

The struggle for gender equality is one of the greatest challenges of our time.

Today on International Women's Day let us go forward united in the conviction that women's rights are human rights, that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and that all persons are entitled to live free of discrimination and violence.

More than 60 years ago, in 1945, the founders of the United Nations inscribed the guiding principle of equality between men and women in the United Nations Charter. Three decades later, in 1979, delegates adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the first comprehensive *international treaty to advance and protect women's rights*.

In 1994, at the International Conference on Population and Development, leaders declared for the first time that reproductive health and rights are fundamental to women's empowerment, gender equality and sustainable development.

And fifteen years ago, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, world leaders agreed on a platform for action for equality, development and peace.

These issues are essential to achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals and making MDGs meaningful for the most marginalized in Nepal. These goals and agreements guide policymakers and ordinary citizens to demand change and to hold their governments accountable for the promises they have made.

The United Nations Country Team in Nepal is committed to working with the government, civil society partners and women and men to advance gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights, in particular, implementing the National Plan of Action to address gender based violence and support the Government of Nepal to implement United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 for the full participation and protection of women in peace building.

Today on International Women's Day, and every day, let us go forward with the vision that progress for women is progress for all.