

Press Release

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**UN highlights need to close critical gender gaps in Asia-Pacific
On International Women's Day**

(BANGKOK) For the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda to succeed, we must root out the causes of inequality between women and men by addressing unequal gender relations and tackling structural barriers such as discriminatory legislation and macro-economic policies, prejudicial social norms and harmful practices, the United Nations underscored at a forum here today.

In commemoration of International Women's Day 2016, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and UN Women held the joint event to discuss the challenges, gaps and opportunities to advance gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the global theme, "Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality."

The forum highlighted the commitments made by Heads of State at the Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment on the sides of the UN General Assembly on 27 September 2015, and other existing commitments on gender equality, women's empowerment and women's rights, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

In addressing the forum United Nations Under-Secretary-General and ESCAP Executive Secretary, Dr. Shamshad Akhtar highlighted that increasing the resources and strengthening governance for gender equality and women's empowerment is critical to successfully implement the 2030 Agenda.

"To break through barriers, we must go beyond boundaries, generate new ideas and take bold steps. This means placing all women and girls at the centre of the 2030 Agenda, but requires a specific focus on those who are most frequently excluded, including women and girls with disabilities, those living in rural poverty and those who are members of ethnic minorities," added Dr. Akhtar.

"International Women's Day should be marked by a pledge for parity – to ramp up the ambition of our vision and accelerate the urgency of our actions on gender equality and women's empowerment."

The commemoration, held at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok, featured a high dialogue that reflected on empowering women and girls make for empowered nations, stronger economies, and healthier societies.

"Women's involvement and leadership are critical to finding solutions to the challenges of poverty, inequality, insecurity," said Ms. Roberta Clarke, Regional Director of UN Women Asia and the Pacific and Representative in Thailand.

"Women are at the frontline of the outbreaks of threatening new epidemics or the impact of climate change, and at the same time are the primary caretakers of families and communities and

advocates for peace and environmental sustainability. Yet women's leadership is insufficiently recognised and valued. On International Women's Day let us resolve to be smarter and far-sighted. Gender equality is at the heart of a realisation of a world where no one is left behind."

While the Asia-Pacific region has closed more than two-thirds of its gender gap, it still ranks second from the bottom in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (which covers the issues of women's economic participation and opportunity, political empowerment, education, health and survival).

In Asia and the Pacific, gender gaps in economic participation have barely changed for more than 20 years, with the gap at nearly 50 per cent in the South Asia subregion. It could take another 118 years to close this gap, if steps are not taken immediately to reduce it and to ensure equal pay for equal work. At the same time, women do nearly two and a half times more unpaid care and domestic work than men. Today, only 22 per cent of the world's parliamentarians are women. At the current rate of progress, it will take another 50 years to reach gender equality in government positions.

The event featured an interactive dialogue with H.E. Dr. Seree Nonthasoot, Representative of Thailand to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, Noelene Nabulivou, DiVA Pacific (Via videolink) Dr. Tinsiri Siribodhi, Deputy Director, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Secretariat, Sokhan Oum, Land Rights Activist, Chloe Reynaldo, Philippine youth activist, and Saowalak Thongkuay, Thailand Coordinator of Abilis Foundation Mekong, Women with disabilities and inclusiveness.

The Regional Commemoration of International Women's Day was organized under the auspices of the Asia-Pacific UN Interagency Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (TWG-GEEW), which is co-chaired by ESCAP and UN Women.

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