Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honor to be here with you today and share the energy, commitment and common cause that we are all advancing together. You have worked hard at the NGO Forum for three days now, and I know that the results are worth praising.

Human rights belong to all, but still the fact is that they are not fully enjoyed by every human being. We have to respect cultures and traditions, but no culture can be based on the violations of human rights. The fulfillment of human rights empowers people, both men and women.

It has been very hard sometimes, but the women’s rights movement has overcome major political and cultural resistance to putting women on the global agenda. The movement, together with like-minded advocates and civil society organizations around the world, made the key international conferences of the 1990s a successful reality – especially Vienna, Cairo and Beijing.

This marked the beginning of a new paradigm: there are no human rights that would not belong also to women; and there is no equality for women without the full enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights, freedom from violence and right to education and learning.

Guaranteeing quality education is key. It means of course reading and mathematics, but also human rights – including SRHR. Attention is also needed to address safe learning environments, including sanitation. [All schools should have safe toilets for both girls and boys.] We must ensure that all kinds of inequalities are now recognized globally and abolished.

We are at a critical moment. We celebrate 20 years of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We call out the gaps and slow progress in many areas requiring political will and resources. And finally we are also only a short time away from the final negotiations of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

From the perspective of the High-Level Task Force for the ICPD of which I am a Co-Chair, we are pleased that the Sustainable Development Goals Open Working Group concluded with a stand-alone goal on gender equality and the
empowerment of women and girls. We also need an explicit reference to human rights for women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, among other issues.

You have been active in working groups here, and the themes you have worked upon are all important. Every agenda and policy in the world today should take account of the importance of women and girls in securing effective solutions to global problems. Be they poverty eradication, strengthening the rule of law, ending inequalities and inequities, and so forth. Investing in women is a very smart investment. We have strong evidence today to show what the positive impact of women’s role and contribution is, and could be, across all dimensions – the social, economic and environmental – of sustainable development.

And still, gender discrimination is deeply rooted in our societies. Even in the halls of the United Nations, we still hear regressive views about women and girls that challenge agreements made twenty years ago. Global agreements, national legislation and good and effective rule of law are necessary. But the role of NGOs will also be increasingly important in the future to make human rights a reality for all.

Young people, in particular adolescent girls, still lack access to comprehensive sexuality education which would give them basic tools to protect themselves for instance from unwanted and unintended pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, abuse and sexual harassment, and to plan their lives. Women and girls also continue to die in the absence of access to safe, legal abortion.

This list goes on. This has to change: international human rights principles and standards have to become reality in everyday life. They have to guarantee in practice the protection and fulfillment of all human rights. It is very positive that the new human rights mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), has made every state accountable for the promotion and protection of human rights.

The international community missed the 2005 deadline for fulfilling a basic minimum commitment adopted during the Beijing+5 review. Namely revoking gender-discriminatory legislation and recognizing that women’s rights are human rights. The Beijing affirmation of women’s right to make their own decisions over their sexuality, without any form of discrimination, coercion or violence, is also still not achieved.

The international community needs to address meaningfully, and with increased resources and strong accountability systems, all the critical barriers
that this Beijing review process is revealing – from unpaid care work and violence against women, to equal pay for equal work and non-discrimination and sexual harassment in workplace, among others.

When we want to get human progress and development ‘right’, we cannot allow decision-makers to ‘pick and choose’ which rights are convenient to stand up for, and which are ‘just too controversial’.

All human rights for all women and girls must be protected – without distinction of any kind. The needs and rights of all women and girls must be taken into account in public policy-making – including domestic workers and migrants, regardless of their status. And including all low-income women in the service sector, whether they are prostitutes, live with HIV/AIDS or disabilities and regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When discussing women's rights and gender equality more broadly, the role of men and boys must not be underestimated. They have a crucial role to play in women's empowerment. I warmly welcome different ways in which to involve men as even more active partners in this collaboration.

The HeForShe Campaign which was launched by UN Women in New York in September was a great idea to create a vast solidarity movement in which men across the globe commit to take action against all forms of violence and discrimination faced by women and men. So let's do it, I encourage you to challenge all men here to visit the website HeForShe.org and sign-up!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have understood and agreed that a sustainable future entails that all three aspects – the social, economic and environmental – are addressed as we, the governments, civil society organizations and the private sector together make decisions about how to tackle the common challenges that accompany us into the future.

I hope Member States will pay careful attention to your recommendations and demands as we move forward on the Post-2015 agenda discussions. I expect the same of the European Union in its upcoming Council Conclusions and common position for the new agenda, and for a successful conclusion to the Beijing+ 20 process. I truly hope that our collective demands and voices are heard to fulfill the Beijing promise!

I thank you.