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Applying gender lens to STI policies to deliver SDG 5

Statement submitted by

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Applying a gender lens to Science, Technology, and Innovation policies in the 21st century

Remarks – HE Shamsa Saleh, Secretary General, UAE Gender Balance Council

Date: Friday 21st May, 2021

Time: 4.00pm – 4.45pm Dubai time

Location: Virtual

Moderator: Moderator: Mr. Kekgonne Baipoledi, Vice-Chair of CSTD

Agenda: • Presentation of the Secretariat work on applying the gender lens to STI policies by Mr. Angel Gonzalez Sanz, Head, Science, Technology and ICT Branch, Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD (5 mins)

- Keynote address by: H.E. Ms. Mabel TORRES TORRES, Minister of Science, Technology, and Innovation of the Republic of Colombia (confirmed) (5 mins)
- Discussants (all confirmed)
 - o Mr. Jarmo Sareva, Ambassador for Innovation, Finland (5 mins)
 - o **H.E. Shamsa Saleh, Secretary-General of the UAE Gender Balance Council**, United Arab Emirates (5 mins)
 - o Ms. Nanjira Sambuli, Member of the United Nations Secretary General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation (5 mins)
- Interactive discussion (15 mins)

Introduction

- Thank you, Mr. Vice Chair, for hosting this important discussion, and for inviting the UAE to share our experiences and vision for more gender balance in the science, technology, and innovation sectors.
- The world is making rapid advances in this field, and the last year and a half of the Covid-19 pandemic has made us increasingly dependent on technology for work, education, and entertainment.
- **The UAE government has always been future-thinking. We aim to balance community well-being with creativity and innovation, including technological innovation. This has been a priority since our founding 50 years ago.**
- **Another priority of the UAE government and people is gender equality, or gender balance as we refer to it here.** Gender balance is a specific, measured, and long-standing government and social objective. **This means that we strive to ensure that all of our efforts have a gender balance angle, including our work in science, technology and innovation.**



- I would like to emphasize how important it is to have an overall environment of – and commitment to – gender balance. **Without the legal framework emphasizing gender equality as a right, you can't expect specific sectors to be committed to gender balance.**
- **In this way, the UAE is fully aligned with the efforts of the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development. I also want to highlight that the UAE is a long-standing supporter of the Sustainable Development Goals. We believe that SDG 5 – gender equality – is necessary for achieving all of the SDGs. Universal application of a gender lens is key to fulfilling Agenda 2030.**

Overall UAE Gender Context & Public/Private Partnerships to Drive Innovation

- In terms of the overall policy environment necessary for facilitating gender balance in the STI field, I will highlight today first the legal context and second specific private sector policy actions required to encourage women to pursue the STI field.
- **The UAE has prioritized women's empowerment since its founding 50 years ago. Since 2015, the UAE Gender Balance Council has been working to identify gaps and drive legal reforms to ensure women are equal players in the workforce.**
- First, A part of our work has been to ensure the legal framework in the UAE – the constitution, the labour law, and the personal status law – do not restrict women's abilities and rights. **As such, laws have been reformed to prohibit gender-based discrimination; there are no restrictions on women's work in any sectors; and equal pay for equal work is the law.**
- Second, and importantly, **the private sector policy framework, including the labour law, must support women's entry, retention, and empowerment.** By this I mean that we need a combination of laws guaranteeing protection for women, in addition to a policy environment that supports women – including working mothers – and encourages their career growth. We know that in the science, technology, and innovation sectors as with any others, as was highlighted in the report summary, there are measurable barriers to women rising to the top of their professions.
- **We heard earlier today in this panel that globally women represent as little as 5.3% of Board Chair positions. This is an unfortunate international reality and one that must be addressed.**
- **In the UAE, since 2012, all federal entities and institutions have been mandated to include women on their boards of directors. Importantly, this year in 2021, we passed a similar resolution requiring all publicly listed companies to have women on their boards. Tangible actions like this propel women's entry, leadership, and retention in historically male-dominated fields like science, technology, and innovation.**
- Finally, I want to stress that **public-private partnerships for the advancement of women in the workforce and in the STI field must be prioritized.** We have first hand positive



experience of this in the UAE. After seeing a trend of women favoring the public sector over the private sector, **the UAE government recognized the need for a meaningful partnership with the private sector to co-identify and design policy reforms to encourage women to enter priority sectors such as science, technology, and innovation, and also in fact to meet our commitments under the 2030 agenda. We now have a Private Sector Advisory Committee that works directly with the UAE government on advancing all 17 SDGs. In 2019 and 2020, we specifically worked with this Committee to focus on SDG 5, gender equality.**

- As a result, in 2020, we worked together to introduce a shared parental leave in the private sector and mandate a paid paternity leave. This policy action will address the under-representation of women in the STI field.

STI context in the UAE

- Regarding the UAE context of women in the STI field, we have had measured increases in this area in recent years.
- **We are extremely proud to have had Her Excellency Sara Al Amiri, Minister of State for Advanced Technology and Chairperson of the UAE Mars Mission lead our successful mission this year. A remarkable 80% of the science team of the Mars Mission were women.**
- Recently, we have announced **the Arab world's first female astronaut.**
- **At the UAE's Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre, 42% of the total work force are women. 70% of the workers in the UAE Astronaut Programme are women.** We have managed to normalize women's presence and leadership in this sector, and I sincerely hope we can inspire more countries and girls to follow in this regard.
- **In regards to access to digital technologies and the internet, the UAE has absolute parity between men and women.**
- Women are really leading the way in this sector today. I know that this will inspire countless girls around the Arab world to pursue science, tech, and innovation fields in their education and careers.

The Future of Gender and STI in the UAE

- **In a time where technology is evolving so rapidly, we have to make sure that policy keeps up with innovation.**
- We are working in the UAE on a **whole-of-government gender-mainstreaming** strategy to ensure that the gender lens is prioritized as we design the future. This means that gender considerations will be prioritized. **Our goal is to increase the number of women entrepreneurs and innovators; to ensure the necessary supports are in place for women**



to rise to CEO and leadership levels in the STI field; and to consider the gender impacts and needs of new technology and tools that will shape the future.

- **Today's meeting has been a very informative one. The challenges of women's entry and retention in future fields like STI are global, and so our solutions must also be global. Multi-country meetings such as this one help us to identify new and exciting solutions to long-standing challenges around gender equality, and it has been a privilege to hear from all of you today. I look forward to a productive discussion moving forward. Thank you.**