Distinguished Delegates and Colleagues,

I would like to thank all of you for being here today at this event for UN Women’s Fund for Gender Equality. I am happy to discuss with you the vision of the Fund and its impact for the economic and political empowerment of millions of women around the world.

We know that in order to achieve real and sustainable progress for all, we must invest in women. Healthy economies and societies are built on a foundation of equality—of access, of opportunity, and of participation. Women need economic and financial resources and political power to speak out, run for office, and support themselves. Equality should be an everyday reality of all women and men in the world.

Investments in women have a multiplier effect that extends across families, communities and nations. Support to partners in all sectors—government, civil society, the private sector, academia—sets this effect in motion through projects and initiatives on the ground.

That is why the Fund for Gender Equality is such a vital part of our work. It allows us to make concrete, transparent and accountable investments in women’s economic and political empowerment.

Because of the generous contributions of its supporters (Governments of Spain, Norway, Mexico, The Netherlands and Germany, as well as private and individual donors), the Fund for Gender Equality is one of the largest grant-makers of its kind in the world today. In four years, the Fund has contributed $43 million to 55 programmes supporting women’s political and economic empowerment in 47 countries.
So far this year, the Fund’s programmes have reported that approximately 8 million women have benefited directly and indirectly through the wide range of grants. From building leadership and financial skills; to increasing access to land and credit; to securing decent jobs; these grants give real meaning to the empowerment of women.

Last year, the Fund launched a Call for Proposals in the Arab States and granted support totaling $4.85 million. 15 organizations received vital investments to advance women's political participation in Egypt, Libya and Yemen and the economic empowerment of rural women in Morocco, Algeria and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

In 2012, we reached out to countries in Asia Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In response to this Call for Proposals, the Fund received 901 applications, requesting a total of over $480 million. All applications underwent a rigorous review.

Today, I am proud to officially announce our new portfolio of grants, totaling $12.5 million for 39 programmes across 4 regions of the world.

Some examples of these promising programmes include:

In Afghanistan - conferences led by Afghanistan Watch will mobilize 690 rural women activists and 275 women leaders to identify priorities and challenges for women’s rights in the country and feed these into concrete policy recommendations to increase the role of women in peace talks, in the political and security transition and in politics at national and local levels.

In Kyrgyzstan - the Central Asian Alliance for Water will work with 700 rural women leaders of Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tajik ethnic origin to improve drinking water management by strengthening their role in community Water Committees and local governments.

In Brazil - the Instituto Promundo will evaluate and propose improvements for Bolsa Familia, the national Conditional Cash Transfer programme that benefits 10
million people, 90 percent of whom are women. The programme will promote
gender equality and women’s economic empowerment among business, trade
union and community leaders.

In India - IT for Change and Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan will create internet
platforms to build networks among key women’s organizations and to connect the
2 million rural women representatives in local government to their constituents.

Demand for funding is overwhelming. With its current budget, the Fund was only
able to support 2.5 percent of applications received. Far too many worthy
proposals remain unfunded.

Over the last four years the Fund has proven a strategic tool in delivering UN
Women’s mandate. The demand-driven modality strengthens UN Women’s ability
to flexibly respond to the diverse demands of a changing global context.

Accomplishing much success in a short period of time, the Fund’s programmes are
resulting in real change for women, and together these endeavors are changing the
world.

Today I want to share some notable transformations in women’s lives thanks to
these awards.

In 2011 alone, the 40 ongoing programmes globally reported:
- 22,000 women have experienced an increased income;
- 229 women gained seats in national and local government;
- 252,000 women have participated in public forums; and
- 92 policy recommendations were made.

And each programme has had impressive local effects in 2011:

Through five grantees, 64,000 rural women gained skills to claim their rights and
access to land, water, technology and viable employment. In Rwanda, NGOs RCN
Justice and Democracy and HAGURUKA reached 100,000 women claimants of
inheritance and land ownership through a mobile network of paralegals protecting their rights under the Rwandan constitution.

Six grantees provided over 92,600 women with the skills and resources needed to take advantage of valuable business opportunities. In Morocco, Agency du Sud supported 600 women in the rural oasis communities with access to assets and credit. A notable result was 90 women produced and sold 1.8 tons of capers.

In 2011 1,700 women were supported to engage in electoral politics. In Nigeria, BAOBAB for Women’s Human Rights supported 360 women to enter electoral politics and as a result 20 women gained political appointments, one was elected into the State House of Representatives, another became a State Commissioner.

As a consequence of these and other activities financed with Fund for Gender Equality, women have experienced improvements to their living and work conditions; have gained business skills and opportunities; have become more engaged in politics and became political leaders; and they have already begun to benefit from new gender-responsive legislative and policy changes.

Our successful grant-making programme has three critical components:

**The first is transparent and independent grant selection.**

All applications undergo rigorous and evidence-based assessments by the Fund’s independent Technical Committee consisting of gender equality experts from all regions. The Fund conducts due diligence on the applicants. Grants are ratified by a Steering Committee composed of government, civil society and UN representatives to ensure valuable diverse perspectives.

**The second component is effective programme support.**

Selected grantees receive a package of services throughout the programme’s lifetime. Each programme is overseen by a regional Monitoring and Reporting Specialist, which provides technical assistance such as capacity building and
training. They also oversee the programme’s progress and support the evaluation of the initiative. Their work is complemented by focal points in UN Women regional and country offices ensuring that the results are captured, reported and widely disseminated.

**The final component is the Results-Oriented Reporting and Evaluation.**

The Fund is pioneering a tailored Results Based Management system with specially designed tools for programme design, implementation and reporting. Each of the Fund’s grantees is trained and supported to execute their results-oriented reports.

The first cohort of grantees is now drawing to a close and the first generation of evaluations is currently taking place. Evaluations of initial grants revealed that programmes contributed to successfully influencing the passing of a Gender Equality Law in El Salvador, generating employment of Dalit women in India and strengthening associations of domestic workers in Cameroon. Soon we will share the lessons learnt thanks to the Fund’s knowledge management.

Distinguished colleagues and friends,

We have seen how – in every region of the world - women are making progress: improving public policy, mobilizing rural leaders; promoting a culture of equality and non-violence in the workplace; and taking advantage of new technology to connect and create networks like never before.

These are real-life improvements for real women made possible by the dedication and determination of grantees on the ground and by the support they have received through the Fund for Gender Equality.

There is great potential in the Fund and its is a call to action for us all to support and replenish the Fund for Gender Equality so that it can stand behind the innovative and effective work of advocates and agents of change around the world. We can all strengthen its impact and turn the vision of UN Women and our partners into reality, one project at a time.
Today, we will hear from grantees first-hand how the Fund has enabled them to achieve concrete results and impact the lives of women and girls.

And we will hear from His Excellency Mr. Herman Shaper, Permanent Representative of The Netherlands, which gave a valuable and timely contribution of US$1.2 million to the Fund in 2011.

We will also hear from His Excellency Mr. Miguel Berger, Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany, which has just generously donated US$3.7 million to the Fund.

We will also hear from two of the Fund’s grantees that are implementing programmes in Lebanon and in Bolivia.

I look forward to this important discussion on the Fund for Gender Equality – on the results it has achieved and its potential to change the lives of millions of more women in the future.

I welcome your questions and comments and count on your support as the Fund continues its work in 2013. Thank you and I look forward to working with you as we realize the vision of the Fund and of UN Women for women now, and for generations to come.