STATEMENT BY

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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SOUTH AFRICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

AT THE 2015 ANNUAL SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
OF UN-WOMEN

ITEM 2: PROGRESS MADE ON UN-WOMEN STRATEGIC PLAN
2014-2017, INCLUDING OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

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Chairperson

At the outset, my delegation wishes to thank the Executive Director, Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka for her statement. We also wish to express our appreciation to the work done by her entire office so far. We welcome the UN-Women’s efforts in delivering on its mandate by helping the Member States to implement international standards in the field of gender equality and empowerment of women. South Africa acknowledges the achievements in advancing the gender equality as well as the challenges faced by the Entity.

Chairperson,
South Africa has identified the following five issues as critical in today’s discussion; as they relate to the Strategic Plan of UN-Women

1st Intersection between women empowerment and development,

2nd Women leadership,

3rd Support system,

4th Progress,

5th National efforts.

On the first point of the Intersection between women empowerment and development: South Africa is actively engaged in the elaboration of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. In this connection, South Africa supports the African Union initiatives agreed during the 25th Assembly of the African Union Summit 2015 which was held under the theme, “Women’s Empowerment and Development Towards Agenda 2063”. Agenda 2063 is a fifty year framework that sets Africa on the path to achieving integration, prosperity and peace. The Declaration contains commitments to: enhancing women’s contribution and benefits from formal agriculture and agri-business value chains; enhancing women’s access to health; and pushing forward women’s economic empowerment.

Regarding the second point on women leadership: We agree with the report’s findings that women continue to be completely absent from peace negotiations and other formal peace and security decision-making forums. We therefore call for a more regular review on the status of implementation of the proposals by the Secretary-General, on the “inclusion of women in conflict prevention and mediation”, and the “nomination of women to lead negotiation processes”. We urge the Secretary-General to give specific attention to the appointment of women to senior positions as chief mediators and heads of political, peacekeeping and peace-building missions. In humanitarian situations, in particular, we believe women have critical roles to play in planning, preparedness, response and recovery. Women leadership remains pivotal in humanitarian preparedness and response nationally and in their communities, and as such their leadership should be prioritized.
South Africa has contributed to the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which seeks to address the pivotal role women should and do play in conflict management, conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

This takes me to third point on the support system, at which we wish to reiterate that, without a strong support system women leadership may not yield much of its desirable results. It is thus imperative that whilst we endeavor to have women leadership in these crucial areas, we also make resources available to support and strengthen women leadership.

Fourthly on the point on Progress, we hold the same view as the Executive Director that despite the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals and the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, progress remains unacceptably slow and no country has achieved gender equality. It is clear that there is a need to redouble our collective efforts in order to achieve tangible results as we set for our targets.

Last but not least on the fifth point on national efforts: I am pleased to inform that South Africa has been able to take important steps to ensure increased access for women to economic empowerment opportunities. In the South African context, where women have been historically disadvantaged by apartheid and the patriarchal nature of South African society, men traditionally dominated the political and economic space. Consequently, the Government over the past 20 years of democratic rule instituted specific measures, inclusive of electoral and candidature quotas for women at the national, provincial and local levels of government, including the Executive and Legislature branches of government.

We also welcome the report on the continued efforts by the UN-Women to forge effective partnerships with civil society centred on strengthening gender equality actions in countries and encouraging governments to implement commitments in line with global standards. We further noted the normative framework of ending violence against women and girls, eliminating female genital mutilation, and addressing trafficking in women and girls.

In Conclusion Chairperson

South Africa believes that, including gender equality and women empowerment in the development agenda is not a human rights imperative alone; but undoubtedly also an economic imperative. We should lay a solid platform towards ensuring that women empowerment and gender equality is central to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. In this regard, South Africa will continue to collaborate with all relevant stakeholders, inclusive of governments, the United Nations system, in particular UN-Women, civil society and the private sector-towards the advancement of women’s human rights. We look forward to the September event on Post-2015. We also once again thank the Executive Director for the report and the work done to date to realize the objectives as set out in the Strategic Plan.

I thank you.