Remarks by Mr. Ziad Sheikh, Representative, UN Women Country Office for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Your Excellency Mr. Peter MacDougall, Ambassador of Canada to Jordan

Dr. Nizam Assaf, Director of Amman Center for Human Rights Studies

Graduates of the Jordanian Institute for Women’s Leadership

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my sincere pleasure to be here with you this afternoon. This event comes right after the commemoration of ‘International Women’s Day’ marked by theme: “Time is Now: Rural and urban activists transforming women’s lives“. And I cannot think about a better way to pay tribute to women’s profound challenges and achievements rooted in the history of such commemoration than by acknowledging and salute a new generation of women’s leaders.

We are at the hedge of a forceful momentum for women’s empowerment, which is bringing women’s voices upfront in the global public debate with movements such as the #metoo and #timesup, bringing a diverse range of women and men, civil society and governments, media and social media, North and South, rich and poor, together, united on a common issue – the harassment of women must stop. Right now. Full stop.

Women’s empowerment is indeed a complex and fast-evolving concept, difficult to measure, deeply rooted in social behaviors, and which requires economic and social policies to work in tandem in order to be effective and sustainable.
What does it mean to be a leader? What does it take for women to be recognized as a leader? While there is no set formula for success, laws that establish that women and men have equal rights in line with global standards and commitments provide an important basis for demanding and achieving equality in practice.

As part of its reform process which, unlike other neighboring countries, Jordan has taken incremental steps to leverage its efforts in the field of protecting human rights and public freedoms and to set a clear path towards sustainable and comprehensive development.

At the legislative level, from the announcement of the flexible working hours arrangements in March 2017, to the abolition of art. 308 of Jordan’s Penal Code, passing through the endorsement of the new Domestic Violence Protection Law, last year we have witnessed milestone achievements for women’s rights movements in Jordan, which has been sustained over the years by advocacy efforts of the civil society and gender equality activists like yourselves.

Additionally, Jordan’s electoral reform process has included women through the adoption of the quota system in 2003 and increasing the number of seats reserved for women to 15 out of 130 in 2016. The quota system has also enhanced women’s engagement in local development planning through the municipal and governorate councils’ elections conducted in 2017.

We are particularly pleased that 2018 has started with equally important achievements, such as the upcoming launch of Jordan National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security that will provide a framework for all national institutions – including military, police, relevant line ministries and civil society – to raise women’s leadership in the security sector.

Through such examples, it is becoming even more evident that to make the changes we want to see in the empowerment of women and gender equality, we need to mobilize not just women’s movements but strategic partners, not only civil society but all society.

As the empowerment of women requires holistic approaches, your contribution will be instrumental to achieve real change for women and girls’ lives. Whatever path you will chose to pursue in your career or personal life, I would like to share with you some basic starting assumptions which I hope will support your action:
• **Women’s representation in governments or on any decision making body makes a difference.** Evidence from around the work shows a direct relationship between the number of women in municipal councils and the number of social reform they enacted and that benefitted the entire community.

• **The business case of women’s leadership is real.** Study after study show the positive impact women have on workplaces – they give companies a larger talent pool to recruit from, this diversity brings creativity, creativity brings clients, clients bring profits, and profits bring prosperity. And prosperity, if managed well, brings peace. So the bottom line is, women are good for the bottom line.

• **Men are already part of the discourse.** Women are not alone in changing stereotypes and social norms. More and more men and boys, including in Jordan, are becoming an integral part to the gender equality movement. For it is men who can convince other men, be their role models. If men were to champion an issue like ending violence against women, what a difference that would make!

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are honored to be among this group of Jordanian and Arab women who from this day will be utilizing the knowledge and skills gained through the training courses of the Jordanian Institute for Women Leaders in their day to day life at their homes, workplaces and social spheres, in becoming more engaged in the decision-making process and in assuring that gender and women equality are always considered. Congratulations and best of luck in your future plans.

And finally, please allow me to commend Amman Center for Human Rights Studies on this programme which interprets their deep understanding of the importance of sustainability as a factor of success in the field of women’s
empowerment, investing in women through building and enhancing their capacities, awareness and self-confidence has proven to be very rewarding. Congratulations Dr. Assaf and the team of Amman Center!

Thank you.