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## **Empowering women helps fight poverty and other social ills, UN official stresses**



UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet

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Empowering women and advancing their rights is not only the right thing to do but it can lead to progress on a range of issues, including the fight against poverty, hunger and violence, the head of the United Nations agency tasked with promoting women’s rights said today.

“Promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment is not solely a plea for justice or for fulfilling human rights commitments. It is both of those things, but also so much more,” Michelle Bachelet said in her opening [statement](#) to the annual session of the Executive Board of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

“Where we fail to capitalize on the potential and talents of one half of the population, we also squander the potential to reduce poverty, hunger, disease, environmental degradation and violence,” she stated.

“The evidence base for this is growing,” added Ms. Bachelet, the Executive Director of UN Women and former Chilean President.

She noted that in a recent report, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) estimates that closing the gender productivity gap arising from unequal access of women to productive

resources would reduce the number of undernourished people by 12 to 17 per cent. That translates into 100 to 150 million fewer people living in hunger.

Countries, she added, are beginning to count the cost of domestic violence to health and in lost workplace productivity, which in the United States reaches \$5.8 billion each year.

“In today’s world, can we afford not to increase investment in eliminating gender discrimination when it has the potential to yield such high returns?”

“UN Women’s good fortune is that it comes into being at a time when countries and businesses are asking this question, and rethinking their investment strategies,” she stated. “Our challenge now is to meet the rising demands and expectations.”

Ms. Bachelet has identified six priorities for the new agency, including ending violence against women, ensuring their full participation in conflict resolution and enhancing their economic empowerment.

“Our overarching vision is that every country in the world, at whatever level of development, has access to the technical expertise and support needed to advance gender equality in line with their national priorities.”

UN Women was established last year by the General Assembly to oversee the world body’s programmes aimed at promoting women’s rights and their full participation in global affairs.

It is the merger of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW).

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